Hafa Adai!

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OPINION METER

This week's poll:
On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest, what's your level of optimism for 2009?

Let your voice be heard! Go to www.saipantribune.com to cast your vote.

102 DAYS without a government budget for FY 2009

INSIDE

Black Nazarene

Tens of thousands of Catholic devotees jammed the streets of Manila for the feast of the Black Nazarene.

MAHARLIKA...Page 13

Critics' Choice

The critics have spoken, and "Slumdog Millionaire" is their final answer.

LIFE & STYLE...Page 20

Judiciary: Budget will cripple the courts. PAGE 3

28th Flame Tree Arts Festival set April 23-26. PAGE 5

Legislature eyes 4-day workweek

By KRISTI EATON
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REPORTER

Reyes

Legislative leaders are considering enacting a four-day workweek for the Legislature as a way to cut expenses.

The moves comes after Gov. Benigno R. Fitial recently announced a 5.5-percent budget cut against all government agencies during the rest of the 2009 fiscal year. According to Fitial, the proportionate cut will help the government, which expects to collect $156.7 million, to finish the fiscal year in the black.

"It would be a four-day paid workweek, one day would be unpaid," said Senate President Pete Reyes, who has been discussing the matter with House Speaker Arnold Palacios. "It's more like increasing the weekends, so we basically close down operations for one day a

See LEGISLATURE on Page 4

Amend Antiquities Act—Wespac

The Honolulu-based Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council is urging the U.S. Congress to amend the Antiquities Act to require congressional approval of proposed monuments.

This comes in the wake of President George W. Bush's declaration Tuesday of three vast swaths in the Pacific as national marine monuments, using his executive powers under the hundred-year-old Act.

In a statement issued Thursday, Wespac voiced concern that Bush's use of the Antiquities Act to create the new marine monuments bypasses the National Environmental Policy Act, which mandates an environmental review and prior consultation with indigenous people and other members of the public.

"The Antiquities Act should be amended to require congressional approval of proposed monuments as it has been done

See AMEND on Page 4

PTI IS NOW IT&E MARK RABAGO

IT&E's re-branding effort started with a roadside waving in front of the company's Chalan Laulau office starting at 7:30am. ***See story on Page 2.***

AFTER ALMOST 30 YEARS

First governor, lt. governor re-unite with Cabinet

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

After almost 30 years, the CNMI's first governor, Carlos S. Camacho, and first lieutenant governor, Frank C. Ada, reunited yesterday with their former Cabinet members at Hafa Adai Hotel's Hana Restaurant.

"I'm touched!" the teary-eyed 71-year-old Camacho told *Saipan Tribune* about seeing again some members of his Cabinet.

Ada, 74, was on a wheelchair when he showed up at the gathering.

See FIRST on Page 4

The CNMI's first governor, Carlos S. Camacho, seated center, and first lieutenant governor, Francisco C. Ada, seated right, pose with some members of their Cabinet during their reunion yesterday at Hafa Adai Hotel's Hana Restaurant. FERDIE DE LA TORRE

Local

PTI is now IT&E, unveils new corporate logo

By MARK RABAGO
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ASSISTANT EDITOR

PTI unveiled its new look yesterday, changing the telecom's company name to IT&E and marking the event with a slew of events from early morning to late evening.

The re-branding effort started with a roadside waving in front of the company's Chalan Laulau office starting at 7:30am.

A number of IT&E staff took part in the gig and were greeted with enthusiastic honks and greetings from passing motorists.

Just before lunch, IT&E staff served hotdogs to the company's loyal customers and well-wishers and if that wasn't enough, IT&E brought out a giant cake for all to enjoy by 4pm.

IT&E staff also held another roadside waving from 4pm to 5pm, this time in front of the company's Wireless Express Center in Garapan

Customers then had a treat when IT&E's already famous Island Cruizer held a special sale in front of IT&E's Chalan Laulau office.

"The day has been so wonderful. After the waving, we gave out over 600 hotdogs and drinks as a thank you to our customers so it has been incredibly successful. While the barbecue was out, we made some extras for our employees too, and we enjoyed celebrating the day together as a team," said IT&E marketing manager Kathryn Barry.

Barry also thanked all of the company's employees for taking part in the full day of activities.

"It was nice to see everyone's efforts turn into such a wonderful day. Every IT&E employee has been a part of this brand change and today is the day to celebrate all of their hard work," she said.

Aside from adopting a new IT&E logo, the company also unveiled a new tagline for the company—"Life in Motion."

With over 75,000 total subscribers on Saipan, Tinian, Rota and Guam, the PTI Group of Companies of which IT&E is a part, is the largest telecommunications company in the Marianas.

Man allegedly hits woman with bench

An intoxicated man allegedly hit his girlfriend with a wooden bench, even as she was holding their two-week-old baby in one arm outside their house in San Vicente Wednesday night.

Cleofin N. Masao, 36, was served Thursday with a complaint that charged him with assault with a dangerous weapon, and assault and battery.

Masao was taken to the Superior Court yesterday morning for a bail hearing. Associate Judge Perry B. Inos imposed a $600 cash bail plus $5,400 in unsecured bond for the defendant's temporary release.

Arraignment was set for Jan. 26.

Police said the victim suffered injuries and was subsequently placed in the Battered Women's Shelter for safety.

Detective Andrea C. Ozawa stated in her report that on Wednesday night police officers responded to San Vicente after a caller reported a domestic violence incident.

When police officers arrived at the scene, they learned that the intoxicated Masao had fled the area on board a car with his one-year-old baby.

See MAN on Page 4

Special Sunday Brunch at
AOI
RESTAURANT
Enjoy the relaxing lunch with Family and friends,
the one that you are accustomed to.
Authentic Japanese and Chamorro Buffet at its finest.
Champagne, Miller Draft Beer, Juices and Ice Tea included
$22.00 p/p
Sunday 11am ~ 2pm
Children 5-11 years old 50% OFF
VIP & LOCAL DISCOUNT APPLIES
For reservation please call
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Another exciting offer from the grand!
Senior Citizen 30% OFF
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A TanHoldings Company

'Court over-stepping its authority over funds'

By NAZARIO RODRIGUEZ JR.
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REPORTER

Public Lands Secretary John S. Del Rosario Jr. doubts whether it is constitutionally permissible to violate the use of Department of Public Lands funds to resolve land claim issues.

This comes on the heels of a recent Superior Court ruling that found the Department of Public Lands liable to pay a huge sum of compensation to the heirs of claimants whose lands were taken by the government on two occasions several years back.

Del Rosario said the department's lawyer would review the decision "and proceed from there."

"The fundamental policy of DPL is homestead development. Land claims was given to DPL, not because it has funds, but because it has the requisite land records to research all land claims," DelRosario said.

He said this is an important factor that the court has to take into serious consideration.

Last Thursday, presiding judge Robert C. Naraja ordered DPL to pay the heirs of Rita Rogolifoi over $1.8 million in compensation over the government's taking of two lands in As Mahetog in 1976 and 1992.

In the same decision, Naraja ordered DPL to remit to the court over $500,000 in rental payments collected from respective lessees of the lands under the lease agreements with the Marianas Public Lands Authority, DPL's predecessor.

In explaining the principle of check and balance, DelRosario said: "Under a republican form of government, there are three equal branches of government: executive, legislative and judiciary." He said none could arbitrarily infringe upon the other's authority.

"Thus, I find it troubling that the courts have decided to arbitrarily take over the authority of the Legislature to appropriate funds, which is specifically reserved for the House of Representatives."

DelRosario stressed that this action makes the judicial branch of government much more powerful than the other two, specifically the preemption of the legislative authority to appropriate.

He said he sympathizes with the Legislature in its inability to appropriate funds to clear land claims "but this dilemma is predicated on the simple fact that revenues have gone deeper south than what anyone had anticipated. Therefore, its inaction isn't intentional but prompted by this very unpleasant situation brought about by global recession or meltdown."

The DPL Secretary believes that the only time the Legislature could address legitimate land claims is by raising taxes or by simply waiting for another decade or two for a healthy rebound of the local economy.

"It should also be understood that the segregated funds of DPL is constitutionally protected," he said.

Kilili's official website launched

By KRISTI EATON
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REPORTER

To coincide with the opening of his office in Washington D.C., Rep. Gregorio "Kilili" Sablan has also launched his official website.

The website address is http://sablan.house.gov.

The office opened and the website launched on Jan. 6.

"The office launches a new website for residents of the Northern Mariana Islands," the media release announcing the launching states.

ON THE NET
http://sablan.house.gov

SAIPAN TRIBUNE
CNMI Rep. Gregorio "Kilili" Sablan has launched his official website: http://sablan.house.gov. Picture shows a desktop snapshot of the new website.

"It is aimed to allow site visitors to have access to the latest information from Capitol Hill. Constituents can make requests such as receiving assistance with federal agencies, apply for an appointment to one of the U.S. military academies, and request a Presidential greeting. Residents of the Northern Mariana Islands can view the latest news by signing up for the website's RSS feed.

The website allows visitors to learn more about the CNMI, including links to federal agencies with jurisdiction over the Commonwealth.

A section on Sablan's legislation allows visitors to view his sponsored and co-sponsored measures, as well as provide a tutorial on the legislative process.

Sablan co-sponsored his first legislation on Jan. 6, his first day in Congress. The legislation, sponsored by Guam Rep. Madeleine Bordallo, seeks to implement the recommendations of the Guam War Claims Review Commission. There are 82 other co-sponsors. The legislation was referred back the House Committee on Natural Resources, which Sablan was recently named to.

Constituents through the website can also e-mail Sablan about legislation, set up an appointment or invite the congressman to speak.

Judiciary: Budget will cripple the courts

By KRISTI EATON
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REPORTER

The Legislature's approved fiscal year 2009 budget for the judiciary branch will significantly affect operations, according to Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Miguel S. Demapan and Superior Court presiding Judge Robert C. Naraja.

In a letter to Gov. Benigno Fitial, House Speaker Arnold Palacios and Senate President Pete Reyes, the two said the pending budget would "cripple operations of the judicial branch."

Since the December letter, overall budget figures have been reduced even further.

Fitial, citing an $8.7-million drop in revenue estimates, vetoed the $165.4-million budget on Dec. 24. Since Jan. 1, all government agencies have been forced to enact a 5.5 percent budget cut.

The proposed FY 2009 budget would affect personnel funding, utilities, non-personnel and building repairs for the judicial branch, Demapan and Naraja wrote. The Supreme Court would face an approximate shortfall of $95,000, requiring the termination of two full-time employees; the Superior Court would face a shortfall of $177,595, requiring the termination of several FTEs; and the judicial administration would incur a deficit of $20,000, forcing the termination of one FTE, according to the letter.

The hiring freeze would also impact the branch because law clerks, who assist judges and justices with research and writing opinions, typically only stay for a year or two.

"Although Section 604(b) permits the expenditure authority to hire replacements upon certification that the position is critical, the added delay and uncertainty will only complicate the inevitable hiring process and expend valuable court resources," they wrote.

Also, forcing the judicial branch to cap salaries of non-judicial salaries at $50,000 will reduce key court managers, specifically the Court Director, the Clerk of Court and the Executive Director of the Law Revision Commission, according to Demapan and Naraja. The two ask for an amendment to allow the judicial branch professionals the ability to receive annual salaries in excess of $50,000.

The reduction in subsistence allowances will affect recruitment, they said.

Demapan and Naraja said utilities also would be greatly impacted. At the current price of $.337 per kilowatt-hour, the projected usage for FY 2009 is $627,000, far short of the $326,939 allotment.

Based on FY 2008 actual expenditures, the Supreme Court will be incurring a deficit of $5,000 in its "all others" account. The Superior Court would receive $93,648 less than the previous year's continuing resolution budget of $265,702.

The Judicial Administration's "all others" account is budgeted at $27,727 — 57 percent of which is meant for fixed costs, leaving $12,002.

Demapan and Naraja asks for an addition $500,000 as a separate line item for the repair and replacement of infrastructure, including the replacement of the air conditioner, the rehabilitation of the fire sprinkler system, the rehabilitation of the security and surveillance system, and structural repairs.

HEAD START WORKSHOP CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Dr. Marvin Ali, seated center, poses with participants after conducting a workshop for Head Start teachers and officials, as well as participants from other government agencies like the Division of Youth Services, at the Saipan Grand Hotel. The workshop was called "Introduction to Social Work, Foundations Practice 1: Empowering Families through Assessment, Evaluation, and Intervention."

Man sues employers to collect wages

A tire technician who was allegedly asked to perform other jobs but was not given a salary or other compensation since February 2008 has filed a lawsuit in federal court against his employers.

Benedict S. Orencia sued Hakshon Kang and his Seven Twelve Enterprises Inc. for allegedly refusing to pay him the minimum wage and overtime compensation, and for breach of contract.

Orencia, through counsel Mark B. Hanson, asked the U.S. District Court for the NMI to order the defendants to pay him the applicable minimum wage and overtime compensation for all hours he worked during and after the first 40 hours in each workweek.

The plaintiff also demanded for damages plus attorney's fees and court costs.

Orencia began working for the defendants in January 2007. His contract was renewed for an additional one-year term, due to expire Feb. 20, 2009.

Hanson said that, despite the contract, defendants agreed to pay Orencia $1,000 a month as a tire technician.

The plaintiff, however, actually performed various other services such as automotive repair, parts purchase and sales, and dealing with payables and receivables, Hanson said.

From February 2007 to January 2008, Orencia was paid $1,000 a month and $700 in February 2008. The worker has not received any payment after February 2008, according to the lawyer.

On Aug. 31, 2008, Orencia ceased working for defendants.

Hanson said that from March 2008 through August 2008, defendants failed to pay plaintiff all minimum wages required by the Fair Labor Standards Act and the CNMI's Minimum Wage and Hour Act. ***(Ferdie de la Torre)***

Announcement for the Opening of the
Psychology Practice of Dr. Ron Meister
(Licensed Psychologist 670 322-0349)
At the NMPASI conference room
Located just north of the Gualo Rai intersection
On Friday January 16th from 3:30 to 6:00 p.m.
Thai refreshments will be served.
All are welcome!! No RSVP required

PDI, KNT eye Saipan and Tinian charters

Following the success of its Rota charter flights, Pacific Development, Inc. is looking at the possibility of launching holiday packages to the rest of the CNMI—Saipan and Tinian.

Company president Yoichi Matsumura said PDI will pursue the additional Saipan and Tinian charter projects with its parent company, KNT Kinki Nippon Tourist Co., Ltd.

"PDI also proposes charter projects to Tinian and Saipan. The senior managing director of KNT, Mr. Yoshinori Ochi, will be traveling to CNMI to make a courtesy call to the governor the middle part of January 2009 to extend KNT's appreciation for the support it received for the Rota charter project in 2008 and discuss proposed 2009 plans for Rota charter and the CNMI tourism industry in general," he said.

Matsumura also clarified that instead of 40 charter flights in 2009, PDI and KNT will only be organizing 30 holiday tour packages to Rota this year.

"As we have done and succeeded in the Rota charters and making it a reality, PDI also intends to work out with KNT and take on the challenge of introducing charter flights to Tinian and Saipan," he said.

The Rota charter flight are expected to bring in some 8,000 tourists to Rota in about a year. KNT has chartered Continental Airlines to bring in the Rota flights. Continental Airlines has been using its 155-seater Boeing 737 aircraft to service the island. ***(Mark Rabago)***

NMC registration starts Monday

By NAZARIO RODRIGUEZ JR.
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REPORTER

The Northern Marianas College announced yesterday that the registration for its Spring 2009 semester has been set for next week, Jan. 12-17.

NMC said that applications for admission would be accepted on those days.

NMC said application for admissions will be accepted until the last day of registration on Friday Jan. 17, provided that both the English and Math placement tests have been taken.

The dates for the placement tests, as well as other pertinent information, can be found at www.nmcnet.edu.

Before that, NMC is hosting a two-hour Admissions Workshop today, Jan. 10, starting at 9am at Room N5.

This workshop is designed for students who want information about NMC's degree and certificate programs.

It is also to guide them in filling out the NMC application, federal financial aid forms, and other pertinent documents.

Rosaline Cepeda, NMC's director of Admissions and Records, said the school offers many opportunities for personal growth.

"We're strongly encouraging prospective students to take advantage of the workshop so they can see how we can help them meet their professional and educational goals," she said.

The workshop is free for everyone, including graduating seniors and their parents, government and private sector employees, international students, and the public.

NMC said there would be no formal agenda for the workshop.

Prospective students can come in anytime between 9am and 11am and a member of the OAR Department will assist them.

NMC offers several degree and certificate programs, including a bachelor of science degree in elementary education, associate degrees in business, liberal arts, nursing, natural resource management, criminal justice, hospitality management, and more. Moreover, it offers certificate programs in different vocational, academic, and professional areas.

ERRATUM

Yesterday's story, "Hours to sell alcohol extended at NMI airports" incorrectly stated that Gov. Benigno Fitial signed the measure into law. Acting Gov. Timothy Villagomez signed the measure into law.

Language panel meets to discuss critical issues

By NAZARIO RODRIGUEZ JR.
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REPORTER

Members of the Chamorro/Carolinian Language Policy Commission board will be holding their second organizational meeting today to discuss important issues, including the creation of working committees.

The meeting will be held at the Office on Aging Conference Room starting at 9am.

The CCLP board members, who recently elected their officers, will also report on their initial comments on the by-laws, as well as on Public Law 1596 and the draft of the certification criteria.

Copies of the draft, by-laws and the public law that they are tasked to review have already been distributed by commission director Dave Omar during the group's first meeting on Dec. 13.

In that meeting, the commission elected its officers: William I. Macaranas, board chairman; Vincent M. Rabauliman, vice chairman; Tita Hocog from Rota, secretary; and Ben Borja, treasurer. The other four members include Maria P. Mafnas, Rosa R. Warakai, Vivian W. Odoshi and Angelina C. Fitial.

Macaranas is a former executive director for the commission.

The board will review the existing by-laws for the commission due to the changes in the mandates of the new public law.

The board will also finalize the draft for the criteria for certification of translators.

"We will continue on what we have started. It's basically for the board members to discuss issues pertaining to the review of the draft for the certification criteria," Omar said.

He said working committees may be created immediately and such committees may depend on the outcome of the discussions.

He said the board members are expected to submit their findings and recommendations as well as comments and suggestions.

The meeting is open to interested individuals who may want to know what the commission is doing.

MAN

From Page 2

The victim told one of the responding police officers that a drunk Masao had arrived home between 8:30pm and 9pm.

The defendant allegedly slapped and punched the victim in the face. He also allegedly hit her with a wooden bench.

A witness told police that Masao held the two-week-old baby in one arm and used his other hand to hit the victim. He gave the baby to her then hit her again with the bench.

The other children managed to get out from the car, but the one-year-old child was left inside. Masao then boarded the vehicle and drove off with the baby.

Police arrested Masao at 11:15pm. He was detained and later released. Police arrested him again on Wednesday afternoon after a complaint was filed. ***(Ferdie de la Torre)***

FIRST

From Page 1

"I see them all the time, but of course it's nice to see them again," said Ada with a big smile.

After having lunch and exchanging discussions about the CNMI's first administration and other issues, Camacho and Ada posed for pictures with their Cabinet members.

Before photos were taken, Camacho explained what the gathering was all about.

"We wanted to meet to see if we can look at each other again and see who is already older and grayer. And who is getting richer or poorer," said the first governor, drawing laughter from the audience.

In an interview with *Saipan Tribune*, Camacho said he called for the gathering because they haven't met with the staff of the first administration for the last 30 years.

"We want to get together, just look at each other. And they want to reminisce, and that's okay with us. They want to comment about what we did wrong, what we did well, that's okay also. Some of us are getting old and getting sick; in fact, some are gone already," he said.

Camacho expressed hope that they will have many more years to go.

"We are a dying crowd, as you might say. We just wanted to be together," he said.

Some members of the former Cabinet failed to show up because of other commitments. Four or five members had already passed away.

Camacho and Ada served the CNMI from 1978 to 1981.

Camacho said they could help the present and future administrations with elderly advice—if they are asked to do so.

"We can help them promote the CNMI not only in Washington but also foreign countries," he said.

With respect to the first administration, Camacho recalled that they took over from the Trust Territory government.

"The Trust Territory government system and the new Commonwealth were totally different. For the first time, we were administering ourselves. We're no longer being administered by somebody appointed by the president of the U.S. We were voted into office," he said.

Camacho said they had to set the ground rules and build the foundations of the new government.

"And we based it on being honest, hard working and being compassionate to our people and trying to bring it to a new direction and a better government for the future," he added.

Coincidentally, yesterday was also supposed to be Commonwealth Day. The holiday had been abolished a few years back.

Sen. Maria Frica T. Pangelinan, who was then the Finance and Accounting director, said it was an appropriate day to reflect and reunite with former key staffs who were part of the first constitutional government.

"Former Gov. Camacho called for this re-union to celebrate Commonwealth Day, and make it also an opportunity to visit with former Lt. Gov. Ada and to let him know that he still plays an important role on this historical day," Pangelinan said.

Felicitas Abraham, who was then the Personnel director, said that former Lt. Gov. Ada and then Political and Public Affairs director Vicente N. Santos reiterated some of the philosophies of the first administration.

"One of that is discipline. The other one is hard work. But I want to add that we also had civility and decorum. Because during our time, like right now there's so much diversity, but we were able to handle diversity in the work place. It wasn't too bad," Abraham said.

She said they were able to work amicably and respect each other's opinions.

"But now if you read the newspapers, if you're not a Chamorro or a Carolinian and put up your own opinion or comment, people attack you and say 'if you don't like it get up and leave'… things like that. I feel there's lack of civility and respect for the opinion of other people," Abraham said.

Aside from Abraham, Santos, and Senator Pangelinan, former first lady Winnie Camacho and then Public Health director Dr. Isamu J. Abraham also attended the gathering.

The other Cabinet members and staff who showed at the reunion were then chief of administration Joaquin I. Pangelinan, then chief of administration Herman Q. Deleon Guerrero, then Commerce and Labor director Jose C. Ayuyu, and then Immigration director Francisco Castro.

LEGISLATURE

From Page 1

week, two days a pay period."

Reducing the week by one day would actually reduce costs by more than 5 percent, probably about 10 percent, Reyes said.

"But at same time we're not thinking about cutting down the employee salary," he said. "This way we're allowing employees to find other means, fishing for example, for subsistence of their families. Or finding a part-time job they can use to supplement their income."

Reyes said they are waiting for final numbers from the Executive Branch before they make their decision.

A four-day week would affect the Legislature, he said.

"Anytime you cut down the hours that you provide service, it impacts the operation," Reyes said. "But at the same time, we need to be very cognizant of the fact that we don't have the resources. It's a difficult decision to make. As much as we want to keep the office open, we must also recognize we have declining revenue. It will not sustain the present operation, so we need to find a way to try and make it less painful for the employees."

Fitial, in his message to the Legislature about the 5.5 percent budget reduction, urged lawmakers to enact laws to help reduce current expenditures and to generate additional revenues.

"Measures imposing austerity Fridays, non-paid holidays, and a reduced employer contribution rate to the Northern Mariana Islands Retirement Fund's defined benefit plan would provide much needed relief in terms of managing the meager local resources needed to fund critical public services," he said

AMEND

From Page 1

for Wyoming and Alaska and to require compliance to NEPA," Wespac executive director Kitty Simonds said.

Wespac was one of those who had initially opposed the designation of the marine monuments.

The new marine monuments are composed of the three northernmost islands of the Northern Mariana Islands—Uracas, Asuncion, and Maug—and the Marianas Trench, the Rose Atoll in American Samoa, and a string of islands in the Pacific called the Line Islands, which include the Johnston Atoll and Wake Island. Bush's Tuesday proclamation bans commercial fishing in these areas but allows for recreational, sustenance and traditional indigenous fishing.

The Hawaii longline fishery currently fishes around Palmyra, Kingman and Johnston Atolls. The American purse seine fishery also operate within the U.S. Pacific remote island areas, and CNMI fishermen have harvested in the three northern islands of their island chain.

With commercial fishing now prohibited in these areas, Wespac believes this could put more pressure on other fishing grounds.

"The significant loss of fishing areas available to commercial fishermen in Hawaii and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands can be counterproductive to sustainable fishery goals," Simonds said. "Reduction of available fishing areas often leads to increased fishing pressure in other areas."

Despite misgivings, Wespac chair Sean Martin said, "The Council looks forward to continuing its work under the Magnuson-Stevens Act and the presidential proclamations to protect everyone's interest in these areas," said Wespac.

Wespac develops and amends fishery management plans for the U.S. Pacific Islands under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. These plans and amendments are transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for approval and implemented by the NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service.

With the new marine monuments, nearly a quarter of the U.S. exclusive economic zone waters surrounding the Pacific islands are now designated as marine protected areas, and the U.S. Pacific Islands account for half of the MPAs in the entire United States. ***(Jayvee Vallejera)***

28th Flame Tree Arts Festival set April 23-26

By NAZARIO RODRIGUEZ JR.
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REPORTER

Preparations are now underway for the 28th Annual Flame Tree Arts Festival to be held April 23-26.

Arts coordinator Lucille Ayuyu said, however, that they are still organizing the composition of a preparatory committee for this year's event.

Even the venue is still being planned, as well as the theme for this year. A possible venue is the American Memorial Park in Garapan.

Last year's event, which was chaired by Ramona Rebuenog, was held at the Civic Center along Beach Road in Susupe.

Rebuenog was named in October as acting director of the Commonwealth Council for Arts and Culture.

In a few days, Ayuyu said, they will be opening their office for registration of interested participants.

"But right now, we are still trying to organize ourselves, finalize the programs and activities and set up the registration form, fees and everything that needs to be done to make this year's successful again just like in the past," she said.

Participants from Guam, Palau and Marshall Islands, as well as from Tinian and Rota will be invited to the event.

This annual event started as a small arts fair in 1981 and is now considered the largest arts festival in Micronesia.

It is intended to provide opportunities for everyone to be exposed and learn different cultural and artistic values.

Activities include arts-in-education workshops, presentation of local arts, cultural performances, traditional preparation of food, traditional games, exhibits of arts and crafts, parade of cultures and traditional canoe building workshops.

FINANCIAL AID WORKSHOP CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

High school students listen as they are guided through the steps of filling out financial aid forms at the Northern Marianas College's College Access Challenge Project's Financial Aid Workshop held Dec. 18, 2008. Aside from help filling out applications, the workshop also featured speeches from prominent figures in the community; NMC academic programs representatives were also available for interested individuals.

Auto dealer welcomes Yumul bill

One of the auto dealerships on Saipan is supporting Rep. Ray Yumul's bill that seeks to amend the Commonwealth Code to allow automobile dealers to pay excise taxes on the importation of new vehicles only upon first sale or distribution in the CNMI.

"Triple J Motors appreciates the efforts of the legislature to help during these challenging times. Passage of this bill will allow us manage our cash flow more efficiently while making it easier to operate," said the company's general manager Randy Steele.

Yumul introduced last Dec. 20 legislation that seeks to alleviate the plight of the CNMI's automobile dealers which have been experiencing steep decrease in new automobile sales over the past few years.

The December 2008 report from the Commonwealth Auto Dealers Association, which Triple J Motors is a member along with Microl Corp. and Joeten Motors, showed that the islands' auto dealerships experienced a 5.85-percent decrease in new car sales last year as it sold 595 units compared to 632 in 2007.

"Anything that helps the dealers helps the organization as a whole," said Steele.

Yumul's Bill 16-203 seeks to amend the Commonwealth Code to allow automobile dealers to pay excise taxes on the importation of new vehicles upon first sale or distribution in the CNMI.

"They (auto dealers) are asking for momentary relief so that we can allow them to bring it (new vehicle) put it out for sale and when it does sale that's when we collect the excise tax and then of course the business groups revenue tax will be collected after these vehicles are sold," said Yumul, who chairs the House's Committee on Ways and Means.

The lawmaker said his legislation does not impact the general fund when it comes to taxes because he is not saying that the government will not collect the taxes. ***(Mark Rabago)***

WSR Elementary School January events

Jan. 5 Students return from Christmas break

Jan. 6 STUCO meeting, 2:30pm room D-5, Parent Advisory Council meeting, 6pm, WSR Library

Jan. 7 Parent Literacy Night (Partners in Print Opening Night) with Kindergarten parents, 5:30pm, WSR Library

Jan. 12 Flag ceremony, 8am.

Jan. 13 PTSA meeting 6pm, WSR cafeteria

Jan. 15 Parent Literacy Night Workshop #2 (Kindergarten Parents) 5:30pm, WSR Library

Jan. 16 Mrs. Mary Jane Lime's class visit to dentist (8-11am)

Jan. 19 Martin Luther King Day Holiday (no classes)

Jan. 20-21 Half day (students released at 12pm), Reading first assessment testing (teachers will set appointment)

Jan. 20 Ms. Paulette Tudela's class dentist visit (8-11am)

Jan. 21 Ms.Dorina Castro's class dentist visit (8-11am)

Jan. 22 WSR school-level science fair judging, Ms. Martha Mendiola's class dentist visit (8-11am), parent literacy night workshop #3 (Kindergarten parents), 5:30pm, WSR Library

Jan. 23 WSR school-level science fair viewing (open to the public), Mrs. Divine Dela Cruz's class dentist visit (8-11am)

Jan. 26 Leadership team meeting, 2:45pm, WSR Library, Ms. Amanda Angel's class visit to dentist (8-11am)

Jan. 27 Spelling bee finals, 2:45pm, WSR cafeteria, Mr. Victor Cabrera's class visit to dentist (8-11am)

Jan. 28 Half-day (students released at 12pm) Teacher professional development, Ms. Monica Pangelinan's class visit to dentist (8-11am)

Jan. 29 Mr. Steve Gilles's class visit to dentist (8-11am), parent literacy night workshop #4 (Kindergarten parents), 5:30pm, WSR Library

Jan. 30 End of 2nd Quarter, 2nd Quarter Report Card Day (Report Card will be distributed to students, unless a parent conference is needed—teachers will make appointments with parents), Ms. Phyllis class visit to dentist (8-11am), STUCO sponsored movie day, 2:30pm, WSR Library ($1 entrance fee)

Jan. 30-31 Island-Wide Science Fair, Marianas High School

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Language Policy Commission meeting today

The Department of Community & Cultural Affairs, Chamorro/Carolinian Language Policy Commission members will conduct its regular meeting on Saturday, Jan. 10, 2009 at 9am, at the Office of Aging conference room. All interested individuals are invited to attend. For more information, contact Cindy Reyes at 664-5326/27.

Kagman community meeting set

The Kagman Komunidat Association is inviting the general public to meet at the Kagman Community Center on Thursday, Jan. 15, 2009, at 6:30pm. Issues to be discussed include the Kagman sidewalk construction, Puengin Inetnon (Kagman Friday Night Market), future and current CIP projects in Kagman (CIP coordinator Vicky Villagomez will be present), and other current community issues. Reps. Rosemond Santos and Ed Salas will also be present to discuss issues. ***(PR)***

Tinian High PTA meeting set

This is to inform parents and guardians of Tinian High School students that there will be a PTA meeting on Wednesday, Jan. 14, at 3:30pm at the Tinian Youth Center. All parents and guardians are encouraged to attend this important meeting. Call Herman Hofschneider, Carla SanNicolas, Lynette Hofschneider or Rose Lazaro if you have any questions. ***(PR)***

Auditions for Valentine's Day musical

The Friends of the Arts will hold auditions on Sunday, Jan. 11, for their Valentine Day production *Let's Fall in Love*. We need people who can sing duets, solos and are able to belt out a song. The auditions will be held at Marianas High School, Room 101D, from 4pm until 6pm. Please be prepared to audition with your own song or one of the audition songs. This is a wonderful opportunity to display your musical talents. Come join the fun! ***(PR)***

MHS Class of '88 meeting set

This is to remind the Marianas High School Class of 1988 on their meeting will be held on Friday, Jan. 16, 2009, at the residence of Melvin P. & Eleanor A. Cepeda in As Lito. ***(PR)***

OES PTSA meeting set

The Parents Teachers Student Association officers of Oleai Elementary School would like to inform parents and guardians of Oleai Elementary School students that there will be a PTSA meeting on Tuesday, Jan. 13, 2009, at 6:16pm in the school cafeteria. ***(PR)***

Hopwood calendar of events

The Hopwood Junior High School's Mid-Progress reports were issued to all students on Dec. 22, 2008. Parents are urged to review the reports. The end of the second quarter will be on Jan. 30. The following week will be report card distribution (TBA). ***(PR)***

Northern Mariana Islands RETIREMENT FUND

PUBLIC NOTICE

Pursuant to 1 CMC, Division 9, §9910, Governor Benigno R. Fitial and Lt. Governor Timothy P. Villagomez, through the NMI Retirement Fund Board of Trustees/Workers' Compensation Commission/Group Health & Life Insurance Trust Fund, are hereby giving notice that the Board of Trustees will hold its Regular meeting on Tuesday, January 13, 2009 at 10:00 a.m. at the NMI Retirement Fund Conference Room, Saipan.

AGENDA

I. PRELIMINARY MATTERS
- A. Call to Order
- B. Roll Call
- C. Adoption of Agenda
- D. Adoption of Minutes of Meeting:
  - 1. December 2, 2008

II. PUBLIC COMMENTS

III. REPORTS
- A. Report of the Chairman
  - 1. ROC No. 09-001
- B. Report of the Administrator / Correspondence
  - 1. ROA No. 09-001
- C. Report of the Comptroller
  - 1. Financials
    - a) NMIRF
    - b) GHLITF
    - c) WCC
  - 2. Drawdown Request
- D. Reports of the Committees
  - 1. Finance & Investment Committee
    - a) FIC Committee Report No. 08-008
  - 2. Operations & Personnel Committee
  - 3. Policies, Programs & Legislative Review Committee
  - 4. GH&L and WCC Committee
- E. Reports of the Investment Director
  - 1. Status of Investment/Market Condition
    - a) PSS – Request for Office Space Update
  - 2. Report of Housing Loan Program
- F. Communications
  - 1. Internal Auditor Reports
- G. Other Matters

IV. LEGAL MATTERS
- A. Reports of the Legal Counsels
  - 1. Report of the Board Counsel
    - a) Lawsuit
  - 2. Report of the In-house Counsel
    - a) Update on Administrative Appeals
  - 3. Report of the Hearing Officer

V. OLD BUSINESS
- 1. BR 08-001 Matters
  - a) Pension Application Matters
  - b) P.L. 15-98
  - c) Disability Applicants
- 2. DC Plan Update Report
- 3. Rota and Tinian Office Space
  - a) Rota Property Matter
- 4. Pension Software Update
- 5. Personnel Matters Update
  - a) Desk Audits
- 6. CGECU Matter
- 7. Crisis Management Policy – Status Update
- 8. 2009 Money Manager Presentation Schedule
- 9. Proposed Amendments to Fund Regulations (re P.L. 16-19)
- 10. Guma Hustisia – Infrastructure Request
- 11. Wrap RFP

VI. NEW BUSINESS
- 1. Request for Exemption – M.A. Sablan
- 2. Car Rental Agreement
- 3. MPLT Fee Sharing Proposal

VII. EXECUTIVE SESSION

VIII. MISCELLANEOUS
- A. Announcements
- B. Next Meeting
- C. Adjournment

/s/ JUAN T. GUERRERO
CHAIRMAN, BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Opinion

Hafa Adai!
Saipan Tribune
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EDITORIAL

Mr. Obama sets himself a fiscal challenge

"Fiscal Space" is an economist's term for a country's capacity to borrow and spend its way out of recession without risking exorbitant interest rates and inflation later on. Generally speaking, the more public debt a country already has as a share of its economy, the less new debt it can take on.

As President-elect Barack Obama and Congress contemplate a fiscal stimulus package that could total hundreds of billions of dollars, they still have some fiscal space to work with. At $6.3 trillion, the publicly held national debt is about 45 percent of the $14 trillion economy — not much above the post-World War II average debt-to-GDP ratio of 43 percent. But the space is shrinking rapidly. According to new figures from the Congressional Budget Office, federal debt is rising at the fastest rate since World War II: It is estimated at $1.2 trillion in fiscal 2009, or 8 percent of gross domestic product. This stunning number reflects both the direct effect of the recession on tax revenue and spending and the high cost of measures taken to combat the downturn, such as the financial sector bailout. And it is likely to be matched or exceeded when the Obama stimulus plan kicks in.

Mr. Obama was just leveling with the American people when he noted this week that the country faces "trillion-dollar deficits for years to come" unless policy-makers "make a change in the way that Washington does business." The question, of course, is how to change. Though Mr. Obama's appointment of an efficiency-minded chief performance officer sent a useful signal, the real answers are legislative. The stimulus package must not bloat the government's permanent financial commitments. According to a recently published International Monetary Fund paper, appropriate measures include increased transfers or temporary tax cuts to consumers at the bottom and middle of the income scale; aid to state and local governments; and repairs and improvements (especially energy-saving ones) to existing infrastructure. The IMF recommends against increasing the federal payroll, cutting corporate tax rates or letting companies deduct their recent losses against past years' profits. The stimulus plan should include a plan for offsetting spending cuts and revenue increases once the economy recovers.

Over the long run, investors will finance the U.S. government at reasonable rates only if it tackles its huge unfunded health-care and pension commitments. Unchecked, the cost of providing Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid to 77 million retiring baby boomers could push the debt-to-GDP ratio up to nearly 300 percent by 2050, according to a December 2007 CBO report.

Ideally, Congress would make the necessary hard choices through the normal legislative process. Its repeated failure to do so, however, may necessitate a commission to recommend reforms for the House and Senate to accept or reject. Reps. Jim Cooper, D-Tenn., and Frank R. Wolf, R-Va., and Sens. Kent Conrad, D-N.D., and Judd Gregg, R-N.H., have offered proposals for such a panel. Hard as it is, jump-starting the U.S. economy will be easy compared with securing its financial future. But Mr. Obama and the Congress must do both.

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To achieve real Gaza balance, deaths must add up to zero

By ETGAR KERET
Special to the Los Angeles Times

Keret is the author, most recently, of The Girl on the Fridge and Other Stories. *This essay was translated from Hebrew by Anthony Berris.*

Since Dec. 27, when Israel began its aerial bombardment of Gaza, killing hundreds of Palestinians—reportedly more than 200 the first day—the word most frequently used by the world media is "proportionality."

How many bombs, it is asked, should Israel have dropped on Gaza in response to the missiles launched—hundreds in recent months—at Israel's southern settlements and towns, and how many Palestinians could be killed for the response to be considered proportional?

There is something soothing in the proportionality debate because it takes unquantifiable parameters such as anxiety, pain and even human life and seeks to introduce them into a seemingly objective equation. Similar to Newton's laws or the second law of thermodynamics, this is an a priori law of nature: an equation that contains the suffering and victims of Israel's southern settlements on one side and produces a reasonable number of corpses on the Gazan side. Something like 23.5 (the half could, perhaps, stand for a particularly serious injury or the death of an elderly person or an infant).

To be clear, I have no objection to the logic in the proportionality principle and the positive, sincere aspiration behind it. The very thought of introducing a rational criterion into the harsh and irrational Middle Eastern conflict helps clarify the distorted reality we live in, and it constitutes a kind of desperate attempt to regulate something that is neither regular, normal or essentially comprehensible.

But let's pretend for a moment that logic can be forced onto the hatred and fear that have ruled the Middle East for more than 60 years. Can both sides here agree on identical criteria for what constitutes proportionality?

If you ask an Israeli right-winger who is under rocket attack in Sderot, he'll explain his own equation this way: Hamas is trying to kill as many Israelis as it can without discriminating between soldiers and civilians, or among men, women and children, and so, according to its proportionality principle, we too must try to kill as many Gazans as possible. The fact that Israel has state-of-the-art military equipment and the capability of killing thousands of people in Gaza should not be part of the proportionality equation. What tips the scales is the degree of aggression and brutality. After all, the Palestinians know that we have more and better armaments than them, but that didn't stop them from launching rocket attacks daily at our southern settlements in recent years. They've continued trying as hard as they can to kill us, and now it's time for our side of the equation. It's time for us to kill them.

If you ask a Palestinian in Gaza, he'll tell you that the reason Hamas did not stop firing rockets when Israel and Egypt sought to extend the cease-fire that had been in place for six months was precisely because Hamas tried to maintain another, different, but no less just, proportionality principle: As long as Gaza is isolated and the Israeli Defense Forces controls the border checkpoints and our population is suffering, Gazans must create similar suffering on the Israeli side. For if things are very bad for the inhabitants of Gaza, but they're not all that bad for the citizens of southern Israel, the proportionality principle is violated. And for that reason, Hamas continued to launch rockets at Sderot and other places.

Not at all, the Israeli right-winger will argue; the effective blockade imposed on Gaza is what preserves the proportionality principle. As long as Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, captured more than two years ago in Gaza, is being held captive without being accorded the basic rights dictated by the Geneva Convention, restriction of freedom and movement to a proportionate degree must be imposed on the regime holding him.

You're wrong, the Gazan will counter; Shalit must remain in captivity to create a proportional balance with the hundreds of Hamas detainees being held in Israeli territory and here.

Thus, it appears that the proportionality debate presents objective criteria for a situation that is essentially subjective, in which two contradictory narratives clash and neither side is prepared to include the other and its suffering.

Is there anything in the proportionality principle that can rationally justify killing of any kind?

The motives of vengeance, which drive us to kill those who have killed people we love, are completely irrational, even if we try to wrap them in rational packaging. We exact vengeance because we hate and are hurting, not because we excel in mathematics and logic. Early in the aerial bombing of Gaza, five young girls from the same family were killed, and many more children have died on both sides of the border in recent years. The attempt to introduce their bodies into an equation that would make their deaths justifiable or comprehensible might be necessary to influence current events, but it is still enraging.

The only equation I can wholeheartedly accept is one whereby zero bodies appear on either side of the equation. And until that time comes, I'll choose outcry and protest that appeal solely to the heart. I shall reserve my appeals to the mind for better times.

EDITORIAL POLICY The *Saipan Tribune* welcomes comments on any article, column, editorial, or topic that may be of interest to the public. Letters to the editor must include the name, address, and contact number of the contributor. Letters that are critical in nature should focus on issues, not personalities. Contributions consisting of 500 words or less have more chances of getting published. The *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to publish a contribution or not; the right to edit submissions for length, accuracy, and clarity; and the right to publish and distribute contributions in print, electronic, or other media formats. Submissions may be sent via snail mail to the 2nd Floor, Century Insurance Building, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, 96950; fax (670) 235-3740; e-mail to editor@saipantribune.com; or through our website at www.saipantribune.com.

How to be stupid…

By ROSA BROOKS
Special to the Los Angeles Times

Brooks is a professor at the Georgetown University Law Center. E-mail her at rbrooks@latimescolumnists.com.

…Hamas style

■ Refuse to recognize Israel. Remind the world that the establishment of Israel in 1948 was accompanied by the often violent displacement of 700,000 Palestinians, but ignore the fact that more than 60 years have gone by, making it a bit late for a do-over. Ignore the fact that most Israelis weren't even born in 1948, and that Israel is recognized as legitimate by an overwhelming majority of the world's states. Keep insisting on its destruction.

■ Use suicide bombings and rocket attacks on civilian targets as a method of warfare. Don't stick to military targets. Instead, blow up civilians on buses and in cafes. Adopting a deliberate policy of war crimes and crimes against humanity helps ensure that few of the world's governments will want to go anywhere near you.

■ Get into vicious factional battles with fellow Palestinians. Why present a united front when you can fight with each other? Constant infighting gives the Israelis yet another reason to consider you a worthless interlocutor. And by driving rival party Fatah out of town, you can drive a wedge between Palestinians and give many Arab governments another reason to hope you fail.

■ Keep that cycle of violence going! The Israelis killed a Palestinian? Quick, fire a barrage of rockets toward Israel. You know they'll respond with even greater force. Be stubborn and keep up those rocket attacks! Israeli bombs can't tell the difference between your fighters and Gaza's schoolchildren. Let the civilians pay the price for your "brave" resistance.

…Israeli style

■ Never pass up a chance to rub salt in open wounds. Keep on building settlements in occupied territory. Stuff like that. Ya know?

■ Undermine and isolate potential interlocutors who might be able to represent the Palestinians. First, destroy Palestinian Authority infrastructure and withhold funds and supplies needed for critical social services, thus helping to push ordinary Palestinians into the arms of Hamas, with its ample social services programs funded by Iran and private Arab donors. Then, when Hamas wins Palestinian elections, isolate Gaza and undermine Hamas.

■ Be trigger happy. A recent statistical analysis by three academics (one at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, one at Harvard and one from Tel Aviv University) found that an overwhelming majority of lulls in violence since 2000 (when the second intifada began) ended when Israelis killed Palestinians, sparking renewed tit-for-tat violence. According to Nancy Kanwisher, Johannes Haushofer and Anat Biletzki, "79 percent of all conflict pauses were interrupted when Israel killed a Palestinian, while only 8 percent were interrupted by Palestinian attacks." The pattern was "more pronounced for longer conflict pauses. ... Of the 25 periods of nonviolence lasting longer than a week, Israel unilaterally interrupted 24, or 96 percent." Always give war a chance!

■ Carry out intense aerial attacks on densely populated civilian areas. Civilians in the Gaza Strip are fenced in—the sea on the west and heavily guarded borders on the land perimeter. As Mads Gilbert, a Norwegian surgeon working at a Gaza hospital, put it, the aerial bombardment of Gaza is like "bombing 1 1/2 million people in a cage."

Heavy civilian casualties are inevitable—like those from the deadly Israeli strikes on Tuesday that damaged three United Nations schools, killing at least 48.

■ Complain about unfair media coverage, but don't let any Israeli or foreign journalists into Gaza (in defiance of the Israeli Supreme Court, which has ordered that a limited number of journalists must be allowed in). That way, nearly all news coming out of Gaza will come from Palestinian journalists.

■ Don't have a plan. Start bombing Gaza to eliminate the Hamas capacity to fire rockets and mortars at Israel. Realize, as the Palestinian death toll approaches 700, that Hamas rocket attacks on Israel are still ongoing, there's no obvious military solution short of leveling Gaza, international dismay is rising, and you don't really have a game plan. Continue to play it by ear -- it's just a war.

…Bush style

■ Avoid opportunities to push for a rapid end to the conflict. Wring your hands every now and then, but don't engage seriously with European, Turkish or Arab actors eager to propose compromises that could end the conflict. Block a U.N. Security Council resolution calling for a temporary cease-fire on the grounds that it doesn't offer a durable solution.

■ In general, sit back and relax. It's just the Middle East exploding again. It's just a harbinger of ongoing suffering, regional instability and global terrorism. No big deal. Let the new guy handle it.

…Palestinian civilian style

■ Be born in Gaza. Well, that was dumb of you, wasn't it? Next time, try to be born in London or San Francisco.

A chance for consensus on Iraq

By JOHN MCCAIN, JOE LIEBERMAN and LINDSEY GRAHAM
Special to The Washington Post

John McCain, R-Ariz., Joe Lieberman, Independent Democrat-Conn., and Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., are members of the U.S. Senate.

After our visit to Iraq this month, it is clear that what was once unthinkable there is now taking place: A stable, safe and free Iraq is emerging. Violence has fallen to the lowest level since the first months of the war. The Sunni Arabs who once formed the core of the insurgency are today among our most steadfast allies in the fight against al-Qaida. A status-of-forces agreement between Iraq and America will take effect next month, providing for the withdrawal of U.S. troops and a commensurate increase in Iraqi self-defense. And Iraqi politics is increasingly taking on the messy but exhilarating quality of a functioning democracy. While uncertainty and risk remain high, and the gains made are not irreversible, the situation in Iraq has improved dramatically since the dark days before the surge.

Now it's time for the unthinkable to take place in Washington. For the past several years, Iraq has divided and polarized our parties, our policy-makers and our people. The debate over the war has often been disfigured by politics and partisanship, precluding the national consensus so important to American security in a dangerous world. President-elect Barack Obama has the opportunity to end this destructive dynamic and rebuild a bipartisan consensus on American foreign policy, including the way forward in Iraq. In naming talented, principled and pragmatic leaders to his national security cabinet, the president-elect has already demonstrated that he wants to set aside foreign policy politics as usual. Now the very capable leadership team of Defense Secretary Bob Gates, Secretary of State-designate Hillary Clinton and Gen. Jim Jones, the incoming national security adviser, can apply their bipartisan credentials to help the president-elect forge an Iraq policy that will garner the support of Democrats and Republicans alike.

No longer does Congress need to be locked in partisan trench warfare over withdrawal dates and funding cutoffs. Our shared, central task now is to work together to support a responsible redeployment from Iraq, based on the new and improved realities on the ground.

To achieve this, the president-elect, his national security team and all of us in Congress should seek the counsel of Gen. David Petraeus, the head of U.S. Central Command, and Gen. Ray Odierno, commander of coalition forces in Iraq. Gen. Odierno was the operational architect of the surge in 2007, when he served as deputy to Gen. Petraeus, as well as of the tribal engagement strategy that persuaded Sunnis to abandon the insurgency and join our side. Gen. Odierno — as the current commander on the ground — is the person whose judgment should matter most in determining how fast and how deep a drawdown can be ordered responsibly.

Based on our observations and consultations in Baghdad, we are optimistic that President-elect Obama will be able to fulfill a major step of his plan for withdrawal next year by redeploying U.S. combat forces from Iraq's cities while maintaining a residual force to train and mentor our Iraqi allies. We caution, however, that 2009 will be a pivotal year for Iraq, with provincial and then national elections whose secure and legitimate conduct depends on our continued engagement. By allowing a greater number of forces to remain in Iraq in the short term, we will be able to set the conditions for much deeper troop cuts thereafter.

As we reduce the number of combat forces in Iraq, our national interests there will depend to an increasing degree on the skill of our diplomacy. That is why we urge the outgoing Bush administration to act quickly, and in coordination with the incoming Obama administration, to put in place an appropriate successor to Ambassador Ryan Crocker, who has announced his intention to leave his critical post in Baghdad early in the new year.

Ambassador Crocker has done heroic work in forging constant and unprecedented cooperation between the U.S. Embassy and the military—precisely the kind of close civil-military partnership that is at the heart of successful counterinsurgency. To ensure that this collaboration continues, we believe it is imperative to appoint an individual of the greatest possible skill and proven ability—preferably, someone who can be in Iraq before Ambassador Crocker departs.

By safeguarding our gains and managing the coming transition in Iraq responsibly, we have the opportunity to turn what has in recent years been a strategic liability into a strategic asset.

Iraqis are tired of the presence of large numbers of foreign forces in their country, as was unfortunately illustrated by the shoe-throwing incident during President Bush's recent trip to Baghdad. These resentments will diminish as U.S. troops withdraw, but they should not, in any case, obscure the remarkable consensus that exists among Iraq's democratically elected leaders about building a long-term partnership with the United States.

Iraq can serve as an anchor of stability in the region, a counter to Iranian hegemony and a model of democracy for the Middle East.

This outcome is not yet guaranteed, even with all the success we have seen over the previous two years in Iraq. That is what makes it all the more important that Republicans and Democrats put aside the differences over Iraq that have divided us in the past. The president-elect has the chance to repair this breach in our politics by adopting a set of policies, resting on the best judgments of our commanders and diplomats on the ground, that all of us — Democrats and Republicans alike—will be able to support. We have high hopes that he will do so.

Letter to the Editor

Recognition of good service

Our transformer blew this week. CUC linemen responded quickly to assess the situation to find the transformer had to be replaced.

That was bad news indeed. That meant no power all night. Used to the blight of CUC and its problems, I waited to see what would happen.

It was Christmas all over again for me when I found out they informed their manager they were going to proceed with the transformer replacement. Here's the fun part. The road to my house is almost as steep as the one to heaven. It was pitch black, one CUC pickup had one hand-held spotlight and there is only one bucket truck for the entire island. Yes, it really did take four guys to do the job. They managed to get the truck up my road, worked with ropes and pulleys to bring down the damaged transformer and hoist the good one using manpower (no power winch), worked diligently and methodically to install this equipment. It was awesome to watch. Okay, so I am easily entertained. I, however, do not take power for granted anymore, and I am totally impressed by these linemen who were *absolute professionals* in their work.

We want to recognize Jason Reyes, Mike Kukkun, Leeroy Greenman, Oscar Babauta, Jr., our heroes for restoring power that fateful night. I also want to recognize Aldrin Oikang for making sure the old transformer is disposed of properly by removing it from our premises, as it should be. Last but not least, I want to thank their manager, Gary Camacho, for making himself available when such incidents occur.

This is what I pay taxes for.

Lucy Sablan
Chalan Kiya, Saipan

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam Homepage: www.prh.noaa.gov/guam/

The Weather

5-Day Forecast for Saipan and Tinian

TODAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY
Partly cloudy with a slight chance of showers. East winds 10 to 15 mph.	Partly cloudy with a slight chance of showers. East winds 10 to 15 mph.	Partly cloudy with a slight chance of showers.	Partly cloudy with a slight chance of showers.	Partly cloudy with a slight chance of showers.
▲87° ▼76°	▲87° ▼76°	▲87° ▼76°	▲87° ▼78°	▲87° ▼78°

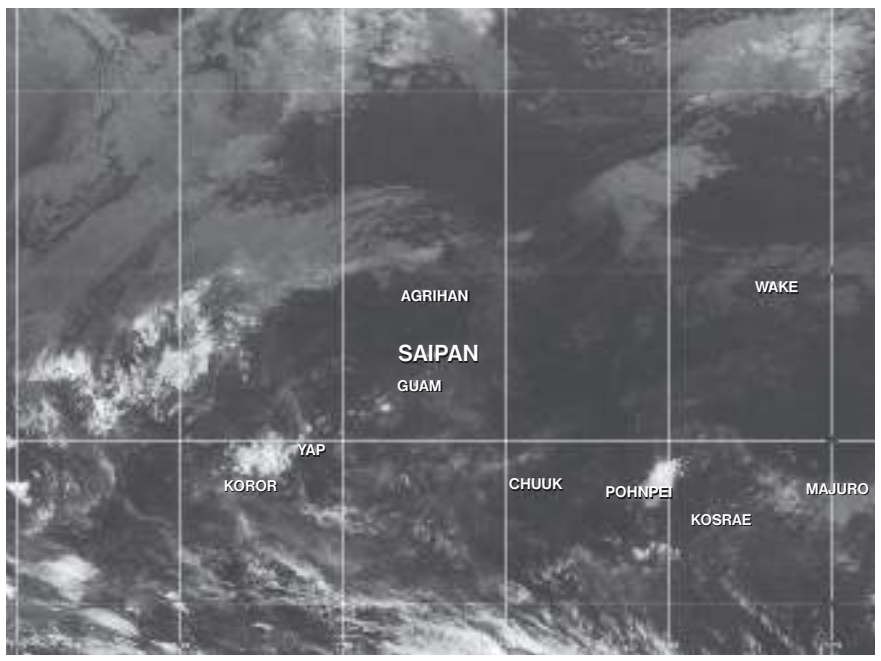
Micronesia

Guam and Rota	Sunny	▲85	▼76
Palau	Showers	▲88	▼77
Yap	Partly Sunny	▲90	▼77
Chuuk	Showers	▲89	▼80
Pohnpei	Showers	▲87	▼76
Kosrae	Showers	▲88	▼75
Majuro	Rain	▲85	▼78

Around The Globe

Auckland	Rain	▲74	▼67
Beijing	Sunny	▲33	▼12
Hong Kong	Sunny	▲62	▼54
Honolulu	Showers	▲79	▼69
London	Partly Sunny	▲37	▼30
Los Angeles	Sunny	▲74	▼48
Manila	Rain	▲80	▼70
Melbourne	Partly Sunny	▲82	▼64
Miami	Sunny	▲80	▼65
New York	Snow	▲31	▼24
Osaka	Rain/Snow	▲40	▼29
Paris	Sunny	▲36	▼27
Pusan	Sunny	▲39	▼18
Rome	Cloudy	▲52	▼35
Salem	Mostly Cloudy	▲47	▼34
San Francisco	Mostly Sunny	▲63	▼44
Seoul	Sunny	▲22	▼ 7
Tokyo	Rain	▲44	▼29
Washington, DC	Rain/Snow	▲39	▼28

Yesterday's Satellite Image



PICTURE TIME: 1:00PM, FRIDAY, JAN. 9, 2009
Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

Scattered showers and a few thunderstorms are found between 13N and 21N from 130E to 135E. Scattered trade-wind showers and isolated thunderstorms are found north of Palau between 7N and 10N from 133E to 137E. A weak surface trough extends northeastward from 6N160E to 10N161E. Low-level winds converging toward the trough are generating scattered showers and a few thunderstorms east of Pohnpei between 6N and 9N from 158E to 161E.

Tides

Saipan Harbor		
12:39AM Today	Low Tide:	0.7 Feet
8:01AM Today	High Tide:	2.0 Feet
1:01PM Today	Low Tide:	1.4 Feet
5:52PM Today	High Tide:	2.2 Feet

Sunrise/Sunset

Today	6:46AM	6:03 PM
Sunday	6:46AM	6:04 PM
Monday	6:46AM	6:04 PM
Tuesday	6:46AM	6:05 PM
Wednesday	6:47M	6:06 PM

Moonrise/Moonset

Today	5:04PM	5:34AM
Sunday	6:13PM	6:36AM
Monday	7:18PM	7:33AM
Tuesday	8:20PM	8:23AM
Wednesday	9:17PM	9:07AM

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- BUSINESS
  Corporate donations, volunteer work, promotions, granting of awards, team-building exercises, meetings and other activities by members of the business community.
- SAMU'T SARI
  Pictures from the islands' Filipino community, primarily focusing on Filipino activities, gatherings, get-togethers, volunteer work, etc.
- TRAVELOGUE
  Pictures of off-island travels. Contributors may submit up to 10 pictures for consideration.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- COMMUNITY BRIEFS
  Announcements of upcoming activities of organizations, community clubs, government agencies, and private companies.
- CAMPUS BULLETIN
  Announcements of upcoming activities in public and private schools, as well as calendar of activities. May include PTSA meetings, enrollment procedures.

REQUIREMENTS

For pictures:

- Photos should be original and not copyrighted. Contributors must have the right to allow the *Saipan Tribune* to publish the pictures.
- Digital pictures should be high-resolution (minimum of 800kb).
- Must have complete details (who, what, where, when), the name of contact person, and phone number.
- Photos must have been taken in the last two months.
- For birthday greetings, must be submitted no later than 12 noon of the previous day to make it to next day's edition.

For announcements:

- Must have complete details (who, what, where, when), the name of contact person, and a phone number.
- Must be submitted no later than 12 noon to make it to next day's edition.

HOW TO SUBMIT

- E-mail: editor@saipantribune.com or jayvee_vallejera@saipantribune.com.
- Fax: (670) 235-3740
- Mail: PMB 34, P.O. Box 10001, Saipan, CNMI 96950
- Drop off: 2nd Floor, CIC Center, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan
  To check if contributions are received, call (670) 235-6397, 235-2440, 235-8747

POLICY

- The *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to accept or reject a contribution for publication; the right to edit all contributions, the date of publication, size of the picture, and page placement; and the right to publish contributions in print, electronic, or other media formats.
- The *Saipan Tribune* will decide how often community announcements are going to be published.
- For Travelogue, the *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to choose which pictures to publish.

NMI CRIME STOPPERS

Anonymous tips can now be submitted through the following:

- Call 234-7272 (PARA) on any telephone
- *11 on any PTI cellular phone
- Log on to the internet at www.nmicrimestoppers.com

NEWS DESK For news tips, corrections and requests for news coverage, call (670) 235-NEWS (6397), 235-2440, fax 235,3740. E-mail: editor@saipantribune.com. Website:www.saipantribune.com.

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ADVERTISING For inquiries contact (670) 235-2769. E-mail: sales@saipantribune.com

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JANUARY 1, 2009

DEPARTURES

Saipan-Rota			
CO9597	11:50am	12:25pm	1,7
Saipan-Guam			
CO9317	5:00am	5:50am	Daily
CO9313	8:30am	9:20am	Daily
CO9597	11:50am	1:20pm	1,7 via Rota
CO9601	12:30pm	1:20pm	2,3,4,5,6
CO9603	3:30pm	4:20pm	Daily
CO9605	6:30pm	7:20pm	Daily
CO9599	9:30pm	10:20pm	Daily
Saipan-Narita			
NW 099	5:00am	7:35am	Daily
NW 078	8:20am	1:30pm	2,3,4,5,6,7
NW 075	4:55pm	7:30pm	Daily
Guam-Narita			
NW 73	4:10pm	7:00pm	Daily
NW 81	3:55pm	6:55pm	Daily
Saipan-Osaka			
OZ 119	4:00am	6:40am	1,4,6
NW 083	4:30pm	7:20pm	Daily
Guam-Osaka			
NW 79	4:45pm	7:35pm	Daily
Saipan-Nagoya			
NW 078	8:20am	11:05am	Daily
Guam-Nagoya			
NW 23	4:30pm	7:20pm	Daily
Saipan-Incheon			
OZ 604	2:10am	6:00am	1
OZ 604	2:40am	6:30am	2,3,4,5,6,7
OZ 119	4:00am	11:25am	1,4,6 via Osaka
OZ 606	3:20pm	7:00pm	Daily
Saipan-Busan			
OZ 608	3:20am	6:50am	1,4,5,7
Saipan-Shanghai			
FM 844	2:50am	5:40am	2,6
Rota-Guam			
CO 9597	12:50pm	1:20pm	1,7
Guam-Palau			
CO 953	7:40pm	8:40pm	1,7
CO 893	5:50pm	6:50pm	3,5
Palau-Manila			
CO 893	7:35pm	9:10pm	3,5
Guam-Manila			
CO 893	5:50pm	9:10pm	3,5 via Koror
CO 933	8:00pm	9:40pm	Daily
PR 111	6:00am	7:50am	1,2,4,6,7
Nagoya-Manila			
NW 71	8:40pm	11:55pm	Daily
Incheon-Hongkong			
OZ 721	9:20am	12:00pm	Daily
OZ 723	7:45pm	10:35pm	Daily
OZ 7173	8:00pm	10:50pm	5,7
Narita-Manila			
NW 1	7:00pm	10:55pm	Daily

ARRIVALS

Rota-Saipan			
CO 9598	3:25am	4:00am	5,6
Guam-Saipan			
CO 9316	2:30am	3:20am	1,2,3,4,7
CO9598	2:30am	4:00am	5,6 via Rota
CO9596	7:00am	7:50am	Daily
CO9600	10:20am	11:10am	Daily
CO9602	2:00pm	2:50pm	Daily
CO9604	5:00pm	5:50pm	Daily
CO9606	8:00pm	8:50pm	Daily
Narita-Saipan			
NW 076	10:15am	2:40pm	Daily
NW 077	6:25pm	1:20am+1	2,3,4,5,6,7
NW 100	8:45pm	1:10am+1	Daily
Narita-Guam			
NW 74	9:45am	2:20pm	Daily
NW 82	10:30am	3:10pm	Daily
Osaka-Saipan			
OZ 120	9:50pm	2:20am+1	3,5,7
NW 084	10:40am	3:05pm	Daily
Osaka-Guam			
NW 80	10:30am	3:00pm	Daily
Nagoya-Saipan			
NW 077	9:00pm	1:20am+1	Daily
Nagoya-Guam			
NW 24	10:00am	2:30pm	Daily
Incheon-Saipan			
OZ 605	9:00am	2:20pm	Daily
OZ 603	7:40pm	1:00am+1	7
OZ 120	7:10pm	2:20am+1	3,5,7 via Osaka
OZ 603	8:10pm	1:30am+1	1,2,3,4,5,6
Busan-Saipan			
OZ 607	9:00pm	2:10am+1	3,4,6,7
Shanghai-Saipan			
FM 843	7:15pm	1:50am+1	1,5
Guam-Rota			
CO 9598	2:30am	3:00am	5,6
Palau-Guam			
CO 954	2:30am	5:25am	1,2
CO 892	2:35am	5:30am	4,6
Manila-Palau			
CO 892	10:10pm	1:50am+1	3,5
Manila-Guam			
CO 892	10:10pm	5:30am+1	3,5 via Koror
CO 934	11:10pm	4:40am+1	Daily
PR 110	10:10pm	4:00am+1	1,3,5,6,7
Manila-Nagoya			
NW 72	6:30am	11:05am	Daily
Hongkong-Incheon			
OZ 724	12:30am	4:50am	Daily
OZ 7183	12:45am	5:05am	1,4,6
OZ 722	1:30pm	5:45pm	Daily
Manila-Narita			
NW 2	7:45am	12:40pm	Daily

Editor's Note: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); CO: Continental; FM: Shanghai Airlines; PR: Philippine Airlines; NW: Northwest; OZ: Asiana
ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)

FREEDOM AIR FLIGHT SCHEDULE

Airline	ETD	ETA	Frequency
Guam-Rota			
FRE 100	7:00am	7:30am	Daily
Rota-Saipan			
FRE 100	7:50am	8:20am	Daily
Saipan-Rota			
FRE 200	9:00am	9:30am	Daily
Rota-Guam			
FRE 200	9:50am	10:15am	Daily
Guam-Rota			
FRE 300	4:00pm	4:30pm	Daily
Rota-Saipan			
FRE 300	4:50pm	5:25pm	Daily
Saipan-Rota			
FRE 400	6:00pm	6:30pm	Daily
Rota-Guam			
FRE 400	6:45pm	7:15pm	Daily
Saipan-Tinian			
FRE 101	6:45am	6:55am	Daily
FRE 103	7:30am	7:40am	Daily
FRE 105	8:00am	8:10am	Daily
FRE 107	8:40am	8:50am	Daily
FRE 109*	9:10am	9:20am	Daily
FRE 111*	10:45am	10:55am	Daily
FRE 113	11:40am	11:50am	Daily
FRE 115	1:00pm	1:10pm	Daily
FRE 117	2:30pm	2:40pm	Daily
FRE 119	4:00pm	4:10pm	Daily
FRE 121	4:40pm	4:50pm	Daily
FRE 123 *	5:40pm	5:50pm	Daily
FRE 125 *	6:00pm	6:10pm	Daily
Tinian-Saipan w/ connecting flights to Rota or Guam**			
FRE 102	7:05am	7:15am	Daily
FRE 104	7:50am	8:00am	Daily
FRE 106**	8:20am	8:30am	Daily
FRE 108**	9:00am	9:10am	Daily
FRE 110	10:00am	10:10am	Daily
FRE 112	11:05am	11:15am	Daily
FRE 114	12:00pm	12:10pm	Daily
FRE 116	1:30pm	1:40pm	Daily
FRE 118	2:50pm	3:00pm	Daily
FRE 120**	4:20pm	4:30pm	Daily
FRE 122**	5:00pm	5:10pm	Daily
FRE 124	6:05pm	6:15pm	Daily
FRE 126	6:20pm	6:30pm	Daily

Schedule of Religious Services

CATHOLIC

Mt. Carmel Cathedral
Sunday Mass: 6am, 9am, 11am and 6pm
Monday-Saturday: 6am
Wednesday: 6am and 6pm

Korean Center
Sunday: 10:30am
Wednesday: 10am
Thursday-Friday: 8pm
Saturday: 3pm and 7:30pm

Kristo Rai Parish
Sunday Mass: 6am, 8am and 9:30am
Monday- Saturday: 6am
Wednesday: 6am and 6pm
Saturday: 6am and 6pm

Nuestra Senora De Soledad Parish
Wednesday Mass: 6pm
First Friday Healing Mass: 6pm
Saturday Mass: 6pm
Sunday Masses: 7:30am & 9am

Saint Jude Parish
Sunday: 6am, 8am, 10am
Wednesday and Thursday: 6pm

San Antonio Parish
Sunday: 6am and 8am
Tuesday and Friday: 6pm

San Francisco de Borja-Rota
Sunday: 6am and 8am
Monday-Saturday: 6am
Wednesday: 6pm

San Isidro-Rota
Sunday: 5am and 10am
Monday-Wednesday: 7pm
Thursday-Saturday: 5am and 7pm

San Jose (Oleai) Parish
Sunday: 6am and 7:30am
Tuesday-Wednesday and Friday-Saturday: 6pm

San Roque Parish
Sunday: 9am
Wednesday: 6pm
Saturday: 10:30am

San Vicente Parish
Sunday: 6am, 9am and 6pm
Monday-Saturday: 6pm

Santa Remedios
Sunday: 7:30am
Tuesday: 6pm
Saturday: 10am-Baptism

Santa Soledad
Sunday: 7:30am

PROTESTANT

Born Again Christian (Upper Room Int'l Ministries), Saipan
Wednesday Prayer and Healing Night: 8-10:30pm
Saturday Tagalog Service: 8-10:30pm
Sunday English Service: 9:30-11am
Sunday School for Children: 10-11am
Sunday Filipino Service: 7-9pm

Calvary Baptist Church, Saipan
Sunday School: 9am
Sunday Morning Worship: 10am
Sunday Evening Worship: 6pm
Wednesday Prayer Service: 7pm

Chinese Christian Church of Saipan
Worship Services: Sunday, 10am and 7:30pm
Bible Study: Tuesday-Friday, 9:25pm

Cornerstone Christian Church, Saipan
Worship/Study Opportunities
Adult Sunday School: 9am
Youth Sunday School: 9am
English Worship Service Sunday: 10am
Sunday Service: 5:30pm
Worship/Fellowship Sunday: 9:30pm
Evangelism/Follow-up: Sunday/Monday: 1:30/7:30pm
Worship Team: Monday/Saturday-9pm;
Cell Groups Tuesday: 7:30pm
Mid-week Service: 7:30pm
Prayer Meeting Wednesday: 7:30pm
Leader's Bible Study Friday: 7:30 pm
Cornerstone School of Ministry Saturday: 7:30pm

Episcopal/Anglican Church on Saipan
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
Worship Service Sunday: Holy Communion 9:00am
Place: Vicarage, Chalan Laulau,
Call 235-0545 for directions

Grace Christian Assembly, Saipan
Worship Service: 9am
GBI Classes: 4-6pm
Prayer Meeting: Monday-Saturday: 6am
Sunday: 7am
Home Cell Bible Study: Wednesday-Friday: 7pm
Youth Service: Friday: 5:30pm

Iglesia Ni Cristo, Saipan
Wednesday: 7:45pm (Tagalog)
Thursday: 5:30am (English); 7:45 pm (English)
Saturday: 7:45pm (Tagalog)
Sunday: 6:45am (English)
Children Worship Service: Sunday, 9am (English)

Immanuel United Methodist Church Koblerville
Sunday Services
9:00 AM
Place of the church-next to Mt. Carmel Cathedral on Chalan Kanoa Dr. • Tel: 322-6158
Pastor JJ Matsumoto

Immanuel Methodist Church (Filipino Congregation)
Sunday: 7:00am-Choir Rehearsal
8:00am-Church Service (Tagalog)
9:15am-Sunday School
Wednesday: 6:30pm, home group
8:00pm-Prayer Meeting
Thursday: 7:30pm-Choir Practice (Church)
Saturday: 8:00pm-Choir Practice (Parsonage)

Jesus is Lord Church, Saipan
English Service: 9-11am, Sunday
Tagalog Service: 6-8pm, Sunday

Korean Presbyterian Church, Saipan
Sunday School: 8:20am
Sunday Adult: 10am
Sunday Adult: 11:30am
Sunday Evening: 7:30pm
Wednesday: 8pm

Life in the Son Christian Fellowship, Saipan
Sunday Worship Service: 10am–12noon
Tuesday: Leadership Institute 7pm-10pm
Wednesday: Corporate prayer 7pm-8pm
Last Friday of the month-prayer: 7pm-11pm
Friday: Youth on Fire: 7pm-9pm
Tel. No. 235-LIFE (5433)

Marianas Baptist Church, Saipan
English Worship Service: 9-10:30am
Evening Worship Service: 6-7pm
Children Sunday School: 9-10:30am
Tagalog Sunday School: 11am-12pm
English Sunday School: 11am-12pm
Korean Worship Service: 11am-12pm
Wednesday Prayer Meeting:
English, 7pm-8pm
Korean: 8:30pm-9:30pm

Missions Connection Ministry
Every Sunday Celebrations:
10am (English), 6pm (Tagalog)
Wednesday Bible Study: 7pm
Youth Impact Friday: 7pm
Saturday Prayer Meeting: 7pm

Northern Marianas Christian Church
Sunday Worship Service 10am Fina Sisu Housing FS#1 (Child care will be provided)
Friday Services @ 7pm Fina Sisu FS#1 for more info pls. contact Ryan 484-2620

Saipan Bible Fellowship Church
Sunday School: 9:30-10am
Divine Worship: 10am-11:30am
Evening Service: 7pm-8:30pm
Wednesday Prayer Meeting: 8pm-9pm

Saipan Christian Church
Sunday: 7:30am-10am
Sunday: 6:30 pm -9pm
Monday: 8 pm -10pm (Prayer Meeting)
Thursday: 8pm-10pm (Cell Groups)

Saipan Church of Christ
Sunday Bible Class: 9am
Sunday Worship: 10am
Sunday Worship English: 6pm
Sunday Worship Tagalog: 7pm
Wednesday Bible Study: 7:30pm

Saipan Community Church
(Sunday Services)
Palau Service: 7:30am-9am
English Service: 10am-11:30am
Chuukese Service: 1pm-2:30pm
Filipino Service: 5:00pm-7:00pm

Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Saipan
(Saturday Church Services)
Sabbath School Program: 9-10am
Lesson Study: 10-10:40am
Divine Service: 11-12pm
Visitation: 3-4pm
Adventist Youth Program: 4:30-5:30pm
Sundown Worship: 6-7pm

First Baptist Church
(Formerly Saipan Baptist Church)
Afetna St., San Antonio

Sunday		
	9am	Sunday school
	10am	Regular worship
	6pm	worship
Wednesday		
	7pm	worship

Everyone is warmly welcome to attend our worship services. Transportation is readily available to anyone who needs a ride to our church. For further information, please call Pastor David M. Mclure at 234-1939/235-7779.

Thy Word Ministries Saipan Faith Center
Phone 234-0209
New Christian Charismatic Church Service located in Chalan Paio, Beach Road in the Sablan building on the 2nd floor above Subway Sandwiches.
Senior Pastors: George & Gail Kamakahi
Asst. Pastors: Eric & Penny Sakaguchi
Service Times
Sunday 10:00am Worship Service
Sunday 7pm Discipleship Classes
Tuesday 10:00am Bible Studies
Tuesday 6:00pm Intercessory Prayer
Tuesday 7:00pm Music Practice
Wednesday 7:00pm Mid-Week Service
Saturday 10:00am Evangelism

Upper Room International Ministries

Sunday	5:30am-6:30am	
Morning prayer		
	7am-9am	English service
	7am-9am	Sunday school
	10am-12noon	English service, Koblerville
Wednesday	7pm-9pm	Prayer meeting
Saturday	7pm-9pm	Tagalog service

Venue: Jason Presbyterian Church
Gualo Rai, Saipan

Victory Chapel Christian Fellowship Church
Sunday School: 9:30am
Sunday AM Worship:10:30am
Sunday PM Worship:7:00am
Wed Worship: 7:30pm
Prayer 45 min. Prior to Service Times
Morning Prayer: 6-8am M-S

Flashback

A LOOK BACK AT PAST YEARS' HEADLINES

January 10, 2001

House joins fight against abortion
In a strong statement advocating pro-life, the House of Representatives is set to adopt a resolution supporting a month-long campaign by various church organizations on the islands against abortion. The House leadership will be part of the efforts to raise awareness in the community on the need to safeguard the life on a mother's womb, according to House Floor Leader Oscar M. Babauta. Different church groups have joined hands to mark January as "Celebration of Life Month" with various activities, including a prayer vigil and a march to be held next weekend.

Police probes shareholders of firm in savings racket
Police investigators are set to begin questioning the remaining shareholders of Long City Traders Corp. to shed light on the savings scam that victimized hundreds of garment factory workers on the island. This developed as Kwan Y. Chung, 53, the biggest shareholder of Long City Traders, has reportedly fled Saipan. Long City Traders is a jewelry shop that also offers financial services. Garment factory workers were duped into depositing their money to the company in exchange for higher interest rate. Due to the huge number of garment factory workers who were victimized by the savings scam, police gave out questionnaires to the garment establishments to be distributed to their employees to facilitate the gathering of information, according to Department of Public Safety spokesperson Rose Ada.

January 10, 2002

Pierce shuns conditional lifting of hiring ban
Sen. Joaquin G. Adriano's proposal to raise the CNMI's minimum wage in exchange for the lifting of the moratorium on the hiring of nonresident workers is a "recipe for disaster." Thus said Saipan Chamber of Commerce president Richard Pierce, who added that the Chamber has already made clear its positions on both the moratorium issue and the increase in wage levels in the CNMI. "The Chamber wants the moratorium lifted and we are against any real cost in the operations of our businesses at this time," said Pierce. "I believe that [Adriano's] idea to exchange increased costs to businesses in exchange for the lifting of the moratorium is a 'recipe for disaster.'"

Wanted: Federal security directors for US airports
The United States Department of Transportation disclosed yesterday that it has started recruiting federal security directors who will oversee security operations in various airports across America. USDOT Secretary Norman Y. Mineta said the hiring of federal security directors who will oversee security at the nation's top airports as part of the new Transportation Security Administration has begun. He said a federal security director will lead security operations at each airport, including passenger and baggage and cargo screening, as well as protection of aircraft and secured airport areas.

January 10, 2003

$1M disaster checks out
Good news to Rota residents: Federal disaster checks are already out in the mail. The Federal Emergency Management Agency disclosed yesterday that it has released checks amounting to over $1 million in individual assistance to Rota residents. The money is part of the over $1.4 million that FEMA has already approved for release to Rota residents for housing and other needs assistance, said FEMA public information officer Josie Pritchard. Of this amount, FEMA has granted some $656,000 for housing assistance, while other needs assistance has already reached $760,000. A total of 408 residents have filed their application for disaster aid with the federal agency. Some 273 residents have already trooped to FEMA's disaster recovery center on Rota, Pritchard said.

Chamber backs reduced work-hour bill
The Saipan Chamber of Commerce wholeheartedly supports and endorses the proposed legislative initiative to reduce local CNMI government expenditures by reducing the number of hours of service provided by government employees. Chamber president Richard A. Pierce said that, since he assumed the Chamber post, we have been pleading with the local government authorities to look at its largest expenditure cost, its payroll." Pierce added that the Chamber understands the political ramifications of a move like this, "but we cannot stress enough the admiration we hold for those House members that have proposed this measure to rescue the government from financial insolvency."

Business

Job losses stack up as recession deepens

WASHINGTON (AP)—Trying to survive a deepening recession, employers are cutting their work forces to the bone, leaving more Americans unemployed and with dim prospects of finding a new job any time soon.

The Labor Department releases a report Friday expected to show the employment market turned worse in December, capping a year when job losses were logged every month.

With employers throttling back hiring, the unemployment rate is expected to jump from 6.7 percent in November to 7 percent in December, according to economists' forecasts. If they are right, that would mark the highest jobless rate in 15-1/2 years.

Nervous employers probably axed another 550,000 jobs last month, economists forecast. That would bring the net number of jobs lost for all of 2008 to 2.46 million. Some however, think the number of jobs cut last month will be higher—600,000 or 700,000.

If the conservative 2.4 million estimate of net payroll reductions for 2008 proves correct, it would mark the first annual job loss since the previous recession in 2001. It also would be the worst year of job losses since 1945, when employers slashed nearly 2.8 million jobs, though the number of jobs in the U.S. has more than tripled since then.

Employers are chopping costs as they try to cope with dwindling appetite from customers in the United States as well as in other countries, which are struggling with their own economic problems.

The U.S. recession, which just entered its second year, is already the longest in a quarter century, and is likely to stretch on well into this year. The fact that the country is battling a housing collapse, a lockup in lending and the worst financial crisis since the 1930s make the current downturn especially dangerous.

All the problems have forced consumers and companies alike to retrench, feeding into a vicious cycle that Washington policymakers are finding difficult to break.

President-elect Barack Obama says a bold approach is needed to bust through this cycle and revive economy.

Prosecutors: Madoff was ready to send out $173M

NEW YORK (AP)—Prosecutors said Thursday that investigators found 100 signed checks worth $173 million in Bernard Madoff's office desk that he was ready to send out to his closest family and friends at the time of his arrest last month in what is alleged to be largest financial fraud in history.

The detail was provided in a court filing Thursday as prosecutors argued that Madoff should have his bail revoked and be sent to jail. They said the checks were further evidence that he wants to keep his assets away from burned investors in a more than $50 billion fraud.

In the filing, Assistant U.S. Attorney Marc Litt said Madoff cannot be trusted because he had long engaged in a "scheme that required the defendant to lie routinely to thousands of people and a scheme which has caused extraordinary damage to individuals, families, and institutions all over the world."

The judge was expected to rule Friday or Monday whether Madoff should be sent to jail or remain free on bail, confined to his luxury Upper East Side penthouse with an electronic ankle bracelet and under 24-hour guard.

Defense lawyers say bail should not be revoked because he is not a risk to flee or a danger to the community.

The court developments came as regulators in Britain opened an investigation into the British business operations of Madoff, raising the prospect that he could face charges there. The fraud office, which is cooperating with its U.S. counterparts, said its investigation would focus on British victims and "any criminal offenses that might have been committed in the U.K."

Madoff delivered impressive returns to investors for decades before authorities say he told his sons that it was "all just one big lie" and "basically, a giant Ponzi scheme." He's accused of blowing more than $50 billion, paying early investors with proceeds from those who entered his investment scheme later.

Investigators previously have said that Madoff had planned on distributing $200 million to $300 million to his closest friends and family after he realized his scheme had unraveled. He was also accused of sending more than $1 million worth of jewelry as gifts to friends and family over the holidays, prompting prosecutors to ask a judge to revoke his bail.

The $173 million in checks appears to represent part of that $200 million to $300 million.

Nation

Democrats criticize Obama's proposed tax cuts

WASHINGTON (AP)—President-elect Barack Obama's proposed tax cuts ran into opposition Thursday from senators in his own party who said they wouldn't do much to stimulate the economy or create jobs. Senators from both parties agreed that Congress should do something to stimulate the economy. But Democratic senators emerging from a private meeting of the Senate Finance Committee criticized business and individual tax cuts in Obama's stimulus plan.

They were especially critical of a proposed $3,000 tax credit for companies that hire or retrain workers.

"If I'm a business person, it's unlikely if you give me a several-thousand-dollar credit that I'm going to hire people if I can't sell the products they're producing," said Sen. Kent Conrad, D-N.D., a member of the committee.

"That to me is just misdirected," Conrad said.

Sen John Kerry, D-Mass., said, "I'd rather spend the money on the infrastructure, on direct investment, on energy conversion, on other kinds of things that much more directly, much more rapidly and much more certainly create a real job."

The cost of the economic rescue package Obama wants is expected to swell to $800 billion or more. About $300 billion of Obama's package would be for tax cuts or refunds for individuals and businesses.

One tax provision would provide a $500 tax cut for most workers and $1,000 for couples, at a cost of about $140 billion to $150 billion over two years. The individual tax cuts may be awarded through withholding less from worker paychecks, effectively making them about $10 to $20 larger each week.

Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., said he doubted that a modest tax cut would change consumers' spending habits.

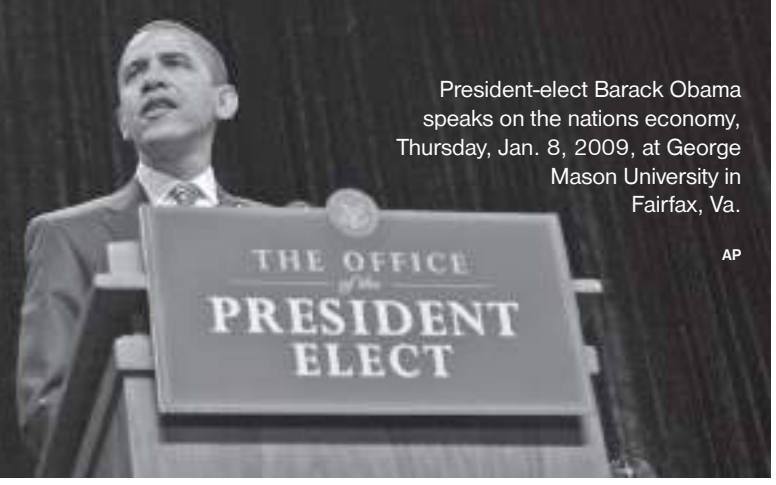
"In tough times people don't respond all that well to marginal changes, such as a small amount of money added per paycheck," Wyden said.

Democratic Sen. Max Baucus of Montana, chairman of the Finance Committee, said he hopes to schedule a committee vote on the stimulus package in about two weeks, which would coincide with the week of Obama's inauguration. Many senators still hope to approve a package by mid-February.

There is "general agreement that because of the recession we've got to move, we've got to move quickly, very quickly," Baucus said.

He added that it is too early to pass judgment on any aspect of Obama's plan.

"This is an early part of this whole process. A lot of preliminary questions are going to be asked," Baucus said.



President-elect Barack Obama speaks on the nations economy, Thursday, Jan. 8, 2009, at George Mason University in Fairfax, Va.

AP

Cheney: CIA did nothing illegal in interrogations

WASHINGTON (AP)—Vice President Dick Cheney said Thursday that he sees no reason for President George W. Bush to pre-emptively pardon anyone at the CIA involved in harsh interrogations of suspected terrorists. "I don't have any reason to believe that anybody in the agency did anything illegal," he said.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Cheney also said that Bush has no need to apologize for not foreseeing the economic crisis.

"I don't think he needs to apologize. I think what he needed to do is take bold, aggressive action and he has," Cheney said. "I don't think anybody saw it coming."

During a wide-ranging interview in his West Wing office, Cheney also said Iran remains at the top of the list of foreign policy challenges that President-elect Barack Obama will face. He said an "irresponsible withdrawal" from Iraq now would be ill-advised. And he said he's confident that North Korea helped Syria build a reactor—a site that Israel suspected of being a nuclear installation and bombed in 2007.

After Obama takes the oath of office on Jan. 20, the 67-year-old Cheney plans to possibly write a book and spend time with his wife, Lynne, their two daughters and six grandchildren. He and his wife will split their time between their house in Virginia and their hometown of Casper, Wyo.

An avid angler, Cheney said the first river he wants to fish is the South Fork of the Snake River on the Wyoming-Idaho border.

Cheney is leaving the White House after a government career spanning four decades, including stints as defense secretary, President Gerald R. Ford's chief of staff and a longtime congressman from Wyoming.

The vice president often laughs off talk that he played his role as second-in-command to Bush like a wizard, controlling the levers of the presidency from behind the scenes. Still, Cheney will go down in history as one of, perhaps, the most influential vice presidents in U.S. history.

During the interview, he strongly defended the administration's terrorist-fighting policies.

Cheney said the administration rightly used programs to intercept communications of suspected terrorists and use tough methods to interrogate high-value detainees. He also said he did not have any qualms about the reliability of intelligence obtained through waterboarding—an interrogation technique simulating drowning used on three top al-Qaida operatives in 2002 and 2003.

"It's been used with great discrimination by people who know what they're doing and has produced a lot of valuable information and intelligence," he said.

Key panel recommends impeaching Ill. governor

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (AP)—A key panel unanimously recommended impeachment for Gov. Rod Blagojevich on Thursday, setting up a vote that could make him the first governor to face such fate in Illinois' sordid political history. Blagojevich should lose his job for abusing power, mismanaging government and committing possible criminal acts, including federal allegations he tried to sell off a U.S. Senate seat, the special committee concluded.

The governor's office issued a statement calling the panel's proceedings flawed and biased.

The full House could vote as early as Friday morning. A vote for impeachment would trigger a Senate trial to decide whether the second-term Democrat should be removed from office.

Many on the 21-member special committee called it a sad day for Illinois, but Rep. Bill Black disagreed.

"I think this is a good, glad, happy day for Illinois because it points out that nobody is above the law," said Black, a Republican. "There have been egregious abuses if half of what we read is true."

Blagojevich denies any wrongdoing and his office's statement called the panel's vote a "foregone conclusion" resulting from proceedings where his team was "never given the chance to put on any kind of defense."

The statement also assumes the full House will vote to impeach.

"When the case moves to the Senate, an actual judge will preside over the hearings, and the Governor believes the outcome will be much different," it reads.

Spokesman Lucio Guerrero said earlier there was no chance Blagojevich would resign before the full House decision. Blagojevich's attorneys left the hearing before the committee voted.

The committee's report said that the citizens of Illinois "must have confidence that their governor will faithfully serve the people and put their interests before his own. It is with profound regret that the committee finds that our current governor has not done so."

Burris denies any improper deals for Senate seat

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (AP)—U.S. Senate appointee Roland Burris testified Thursday that he didn't strike any agreement with Gov. Rod Blagojevich to win the plum position, and said he's never been involved in an improper deal in his two decades in government.

His testimony under oath was one of the key requirements Senate Democrats set out for Burris as a condition to accept his appointment, who initially had balked at any choice by the scandal-clouded Blagojevich.

"I can before this committee state that there was nothing ... legal, personal, or political exchanged for my appointment to this seat," Burris told an Illinois House committee investigating whether to impeach the governor.

But Burris declined to answer questions about whether he would have gone to federal authorities if he'd been offered such a deal. He also declined to say whether Blagojevich should resign or be impeached, saying he has no control over those issues.

The governor picked Burris to fill President-elect Barack Obama's vacant Senate seat after being arrested on federal charges that include allegations he schemed to sell the seat to the highest bidder.

Burris, 71, said Thursday he didn't talk to Blagojevich about the Senate seat before the arrest, though he said he expressed interest to some "close friends" and Lon Monk, a former top aide to the governor.

Burris said he had been discussing consulting work with Monk when he said: "Lon, I'm interested in that that Senate seat and I think you've got access to the governor, so just let him know that I'm interested."

Burris said he didn't know whether Monk told Blagojevich.

The House committee was voting Thursday on whether to accept a report that said the Democratic governor had abused his power and recommended he be impeached by the full House. If accepted, it would set up an impeachment vote by the House on Friday.

ACROSS THE NATION

Firefighters near containment of Colo. wildfire

BOULDER, Colo. (AP)—Thousands of evacuated residents, including former FEMA chief Michael D. Brown, were allowed to return to their homes Thursday after firefighters partially contained a wildfire near Denver that destroyed two houses and several outbuildings. Brown told The Associated Press that his house was spared, but he watched firefighters battle the blaze about a half-mile from his home. Crews expected to fully contain the 3,700-acre fire zone about 25 miles northwest of Denver by Thursday night. The fire blackened mostly grassland north and west of the city of Boulder, an area of scattered subdivisions, farms and ranches along the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. "I'm shaking and I'm so grateful we have our homes and our pets," said Darlene Steiner, as she inspected her home north of Boulder following an overnight evacuation that affected an estimated 3,000 people. Steiner walked arm-in-arm with a friend, checking on neighbors and gazing at the burned landscape.

Fatal police shooting sparks violent protests

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP)—In grainy cell-phone videos played over and over on the Internet, police officers force an unarmed black man to the ground and hold him face-down on a crowded train platform. Suddenly one of the officers draws his gun and fatally shoots the man in the back—then looks up. The New Year's Day death of 22-year-old Oscar Grant has led to angry street protests amid allegations from the family's attorney that some of the officers used racial slurs. The officer remains free and has not been charged with any wrongdoing. And some experts have questioned whether he fired his gun deliberately or mistakenly believed he was using his stun gun instead. At a rally Wednesday attended by hundreds of people, Shawanda Thomas held a fluorescent yellow sign that read: "Oscar Grant: Murdered! The Whole Damn System is Guilty."

Northwest flooding closes roads, stalls commerce

CENTRALIA, Wash. (AP)—Floods, mudslides and avalanches in the Pacific Northwest kept tens of thousands of people from their homes Thursday, brought freight trains to a standstill and stranded hundreds of trucks along the major highways that link Seattle's busy ports with markets around the country. The flooding—some of the worst on record in Washington state—was touched off by a combination of heavy rain of 6 inches or more and a warm spell in the mid-40s that rapidly melted the snow in the Cascade Range. A 20-mile stretch of Interstate 5, the state's major north-south freeway, was shut down between Olympia and the Oregon line, with one section area under 3 feet of water. Avalanches closed I-90, which cuts east from Seattle through the Cascades, along with the two other routes through the mountains. Amtrak service and most freight trains were stopped as well.

Asia

Pakistan fires security exec

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (AP)—Pakistan's decision to fire its national security adviser has exposed cracks within the shaky, civilian government as it faces growing U.S. and Indian pressure to punish the alleged plotters of the Mumbai terrorist attacks.

The move against Mahmood Ali Durrani, a former ambassador to Washington and a proponent of close ties with India, came hours after he and other top officials told reporters that the sole surviving Mumbai attacker was a Pakistani citizen.

A spokesman for Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani said Durrani was fired late Wednesday because "he gave media interviews on national security issues without consulting the prime minister."

Indian media quoted Durrani as saying earlier that Mohammed Ajmal Kasab was Pakistani, while other top Pakistani officials separately confirmed it to media outlets.

There was no sign that the other officials would also be fired, suggesting that Durrani's ouster was caused by other, unpublicized reasons.

India had long alleged that Kasab—along with nine other militants who died during the siege—were Pakistani. Islamabad's refusal to acknowledge this was seen as a sign it was not prepared to follow through on vows to crack down on the organizers of the November attacks.

Doubts over Pakistan's commitment have been fueled by suspicions that the attackers were from Lashkar-e-Taiba—a militant group created by Pakistani intelligence agencies in the 1980s to fight Indian rule in Kashmir, a Himalayan region claimed by both countries and the trigger for two of their three wars since 1947.

Some analysts say the group maintains ties to the powerful military-run spy agency Inter-Services Intelligence and that the government cannot act too aggressively against it as a result.

The United States is pushing for Islamabad to dismantle Lashkar and other militant groups, but does not want to destabilize the pro-Western government while al-Qaida and Taliban militants gain strength close to the Afghan border.

Durrani, a former general, had advocated improving India-Pakistan ties and was seen by some critics as too pro-American. There had been no public sign or media speculation in recent days that he was on his way out.

He declined to comment on his ouster, but said he wished the government luck.

"They have a lot of problems to deal with, and I wish them the very best because my loyalties are to my country," he told The Associated Press Thursday.

China migrants go home for holiday

GUANGZHOU, China (AP)—Some hefted their luggage on bamboo shoulder poles. Others carried their things in plastic buckets. All were migrant workers hurrying to get home Thursday before China's Lunar New Year festival—a holiday that triggers one of the world's biggest annual migrations of humans.

Although the celebration is more than two weeks away, the travelers had to get an early start in a country where 188 million people—more than the population of Russia—were expected to squeeze onto trains during the hectic season.

Many workers were forced to go home even earlier this year because their factories went belly up or their assembly lines were idle amid the global economic crisis.

"Last year, I went back home five or six days before the holiday started. This year, I'm going back about 20 days earlier," said migrant Huang Mingren as he waited for his train.

For Huang and many others, the trip begins at the crowded station in Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong province, often called the world's factory floor because it's China's key manufacturing base. This is where a huge number of China's 160 million migrant workers churn out Nike shoes, iPods and Nokia mobile phones.

"Lots of factories have been closing. The toy factory I was working at is about to go under, so the boss just told us to leave early," added Huang, a wiry 32-year-old native of central Hunan province.

Many migrants also hit the road early because they were worried about the weather. Last year, ice storms paralyzed the transport system in southern China during the peak holiday season, forcing millions to delay or cancel their plans. About 200,000 were stranded at Guangzhou's station and spent nights outside in a freezing drizzle.

ASIAN BRIEFS

Woman burned alive in Papua New Guinea

SYDNEY, Australia (AP)—Police in rural Papua New Guinea said Friday they were investigating the killing of a woman who was tied to a wooden pole, surrounded by rubber tires and set on fire. A group of people bound and gagged the young woman, carried her to a rubbish dump and lashed her to the pole before setting her alight on Tuesday, said Simon Kauba, assistant commissioner of police and commander of the remote and rugged Highlands region, where the slaying occurred. Rumors that the woman was killed because she was suspected of witchcraft have spread through the South Pacific island nation, but Kauba said that was just one of many theories police were investigating as a motive behind the woman's death. "We do not know the motive behind what happened," Kauba said. "At this point in time, we have some good leads and we're working on them." Police are still trying to determine the woman's identity.

Thai police arrest Texas child sex abuse suspect

BANGKOK, Thailand (AP)—An American man wanted in Texas on child sex abuse charges was arrested Thursday in Thailand and could be sent to the U.S. within days, the district attorney's office in Houston said. Confirming Thai reports, the Harris County, Texas district attorney's office said it was "aware" that Darren Ray Castleberry, 41, had been arrested in the Thai capital, Bangkok. Scott Durfee, a spokesman for the office, told The Associated Press by phone from Houston that the process was already under way to extradite Castleberry to the United States, where he faces charges that could have him imprisoned for life. "He could be on American soil as quickly as two days from now," said Durfee. who added that the prosecutor handling the case was well-versed in bringing back suspects from overseas and was ready to act "aggressively" on the matter.

Fire in slum in southern Pakistan kills 38

KARACHI, Pakistan (AP)—Some 38 people are dead after a fire swept through a group of makeshift dwellings in southern Pakistan. The fire late Thursday burned 17 huts located in an open field in the port city of Karachi. Provincial Health Minister Saghir Ahmed said Friday the dead included women and children and that several people were injured. He said authorities were still investigating the cause of the fire. The blaze apparently started in one hut and quickly engulfed 16 others nearby. Fire is frequently used to keep dwellings warm in winter, but such accidents are rare in this impoverished Islamic nation where millions of people live in slums because of poverty.

World

UN Security Council calls for immediate Gaza truce

AP

Palestinian demonstrators use sling-shots to hurl stones at Israeli soldiers during a demonstration against Israel's military operation in Gaza, in the West Bank village of Bilin, near Ramallah,Thursday, Jan. 8, 2009.

JERUSALEM (AP)—The U.N. Security Council called for an "immediate" and "durable" cease-fire in Gaza in a resolution Thursday night even as fighting between Israel and Hamas raged—with early morning airstrikes killing seven Palestinians and pushing the death toll to about 760 in the near two-week conflict.

U.N. action came hours after the world body suspended food deliveries to Gaza and the Red Cross accused Israel of blocking medical assistance after forces fired on aid workers. It also followed concerns of a wider conflict which flared as militants in Lebanon fired rockets into northern Israel.

The vote was 14-0, with the United States abstaining. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said the U.S. "fully supports" the resolution but abstained "to see the outcomes of the Egyptian mediation" with Israel and Hamas, also aimed at achieving a cease-fire.

Israel and Hamas were not parties to the vote and it will now be up to them to stop the fighting. But the text of the resolution was hammered out by the United States, Israel's chief ally, and by Arab nations that have ties to Hamas and the Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied territories.

EU, Russia OK deal on gas flow

BRUSSELS, Belgium (AP)—The European Union said Thursday that gas supplies should restart after it struck a deal with Russia on supervising the flow of gas through Ukraine.

But officials could not say when many homes and businesses across Europe could turn on their heating again after two days without gas during freezing winter weather.

Russia cut off the natural gas it sends to Europe through the Ukraine on Wednesday when a payment dispute escalated. Russia claims Ukraine siphoned off gas for its own use. Ukraine denies this.

Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolanek, whose country holds the EU presidency, said a deal brokered with Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and German Chancellor Angela Merkel had agreed on how monitors should check the amount of Russian gas entering and leaving Ukraine.

"This deployment should lead to the Russian supplies of gas to EU member states being restored," the Czech government said in a statement.

Ukraine's stance on the agreement was not immediately known. The officials also did not give details on who would monitor the gas or when the supplies might restart.

EU monitors will go to Ukraine on Friday but it is unclear when Russia would start pumping gas again. The gas takes up to 36 hours to travel across Ukraine to the EU borders.

Russia's state-controlled gas monopoly Gazprom had insisted that Russians be among the observers in Ukraine. Kiev had agreed to EU monitors, not Russians.

New US-led naval force to battle Somali pirates

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP)—A new international naval force under American command will soon begin patrols to confront escalating attacks by Somali pirates after more than 100 ships came under siege in the past year, the U.S. Navy said Thursday.

But the mission—expected to begin operations next week—appears more of an attempt to sharpen the military focus against piracy rather than a signal of expanded offensives across one of the world's most crucial shipping lanes.

The force will carry no wider authority to strike at pirate vessels at sea or specific mandates to move against havens on shore—which some maritime experts believe is necessary to weaken the pirate gangs that have taken control of dozens of cargo vessels and an oil tanker.

Pentagon officials described it as a first step to create a dedicated international structure—combining military force, intelligence sharing and coordinated patrols—to battle piracy from lawless Somalia.

The sharp spike in pirate attacks caused a "situation where there were competing priorities" between counterterrorism missions in the region and protecting merchant ships, said Air Force Lt. Col. Patrick Ryder, a Pentagon spokesman in Washington.

There currently are more than a dozen warships in the vast expanse off the coast of Somalia, from naval giants such as the U.S., Britain and Russia, emerging powers such as China and India and regional forces such as Iran.

Maharlika

PINOY LIFE IN THE MARIANAS

Saturday, January 10, 2009

Bayani to host cultural show fundraiser

The Bayani Association will host and launch a Filipino Cultural Show called "Balik-Tanaw Sa Kulturang Pinoy" on Jan. 17, at 7pm, at the Hibiscus Hall of the Fiesta Resort & Spa Saipan in Garapan.

The two-hour cultural show and banquet dinner presents about 16 creative cultural dances that portray the Filipinos' regional culture, tradition and arts representing the Philippine islands of Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. The show aims to instill, showcase, and promote the Filipino culture amongst fellow Filipinos and local residents as well in Saipan.

Filipino cultural dances have five categories: Cordillera, Rural, Maria Clara, Tribal and Muslim. These dances will be choreographed for the show by Joel Vallega. Some authentic dance steps would be modified to suit the performer's capabilities but without losing the identity of a particular dance. The entire show lasts for about two hours.

The participants will also showcase Filipiniana fashion by wearing barong Tagalog, baro't saya, patadyong, Maria Clara, Cordillera, tribal and Muslim costumes. Dance music will be accompanied by short introductions for the audience's enlightenment.

The Bayani Association is a duly registered non-profit organization in the CNMI with overseas Filipino worker members who successfully completed various free skills upgrading courses at the Filipino Workers Resource Center in Saipan. Among its objectives is to uphold, preserve and promote the fundamental values and culture of the Filipinos through sharing of ideas and information.

The CNMI Guma' Ezperansa/Karidat is the chosen beneficiary for the net proceeds of the event. Guma's Manager Lauri Ogumoro will grace the occasion with the Philippine Consulate General officials and other guests. ***(PR)***

RP-US 'Balikatan' goes to Bicol

By EPHRAIM AGUILAR,
ROY GERSALIA
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

LEGAZPI CITY—While no one can predict how a Barack Obama presidency will affect ties between the Philippines and the United States, a US Navy officer thinks the time-tested "good relations" are not likely to change.

Proof of this, according to Capt. Kelly Schmader, commander of the 30th Naval Construction Regiment, are the 2009 RP-US Balikatan military exercises that will be held in three Bicol provinces—Albay, Masbate and Sorsogon—in April.

Schmader visited the Bicol region Thursday to see to the final stages of surveying and planning for the Balikatan (meaning "shoulder to shoulder"), which is now on its 14th year in the country.

"My commander in chief is President [George W.] Bush. Nobody knows at this point what might happen beyond his administration. But personally, I do not expect that the good RP-US ties will change," Schmader said at a press conference.

The Balikatan is part of the mutual defense treaty between the Philippines and the United States, he pointed out.

In Sorsogon on Wednesday, Schmader and 30 other US soldiers had a three-hour dialogue with Sorsogon Gov. Sally Lee and Juban Mayor Maritess Guab-Fragata to formalize arrangements for the exercises to be held in the Pacific Board area near Albay and Sorsogon.

The deployment of an engineering battalion and medical mission groups was among the points discussed.

Purely humanitarian

Last year's Balikatan was held in Mindanao. Its primary objective was to improve the "interoperability" of the two countries' armed forces for mutual defense.

This time, some 400 American doctors, engineers and nurses, predominantly belonging to the military, will join the month-long exercises to provide humanitarian aid to depressed areas in Albay, Masbate and Sorsogon, Schmader said.

These provinces are considered hotbeds of communist insurgency in the Bicol region. But Col. Ariel Bernardo, commander of the Philippine Army's 901st Infantry Brigade, said there would be no war games in the coming exercises.

Intervention suspected

"The Bicol Balikatan shall only comprise humanitarian projects in the form of medical missions and engineering works," Bernardo said.

But Greg Bañares, spokesperson of the communist-led National Democratic Front in Bicol, said in a press statement that the US soldiers might intervene in the armed battles between government troops and New People's Army guerrillas.

He also warned that the "fake" humanitarian missions could be used to survey the Philippines' rich lands and seas or to spy on revolutionary movements.

Bernardo dismissed these accusations, saying the aims of the exercises were peace and development.

"We are [conducting] development projects in depressed communities because we recognize poverty as the root cause of the insurgency," he said.

AP

ANNUAL DEVOTION

Filipino barefoot devotees climb to touch the image of the Black Nazarene during a rowdy procession to celebrate its 402nd anniversary Friday, Jan. 9, 2009 in Manila, Philippines. ***See story on next page.***

POLO to offer new courses

Registration for the home décor plus sewing course at the Philippine Overseas Labor Office is set to begin Sunday, according to the Philippine Consulate General.

The course will be conducted at the Filipino Workers Resource Center, ground floor of the Marianas Business Plaza, Susupe, Saipan for eight Sundays from 9am to 12pm beginning Jan. 18 to March 8, 2009.

Overseas Filipino worker applicants need to have basic sewing skills or able to operate a sewing machine to enroll. Those interested and qualified may file their application at the POLO.

Registration starts on Sunday, Jan. 11, 2009, on a first-come, first-served basis. Only the first 30 applicants will be admitted to this course. Applicants are requested to bring their entry permit or copy of their CNMI labor renewal processing receipt.

For inquiries, visit the POLO at the ground floor of the Marianas Business Plaza or call 235-3411. ***(PR)***

POLO *to offer plan reading course*

The Philippine Consulate General's Labor Office, in cooperation with MAFEA, thru its president, Bong de Guzman, announced the opening of the registration for the plan reading course, which will be conducted at the Filipino Workers Resource Center, ground floor of the Marianas Business Plaza, Susupe, for eight Sundays from 1pm to 4pm, beginning Feb. 1 to March 22, 2009.

This training course is open to workers in the construction industry to help them gain knowledge in plan reading for the following areas: mechanical, civil, structural, electrical, architectural, plumbing, and safety and compliance.

Registration starts on Monday, Jan. 12, 2009 on a first-come, first-served basis. Only the first 50 applicants will be admitted to this course. pplicants are requested to bring their entry permit or copy of their CNMI labor renewal processing receipt.

For inquiries, visit the POLO at the ground floor of Marianas Business Plaza or call 235-3411. ***(PR)***

? LABOR FRONT

Terminated alien worker's right to challenge

By FERDIE PONCE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Q: Does an alien worker have the right to contest with the Department of Labor his or her termination for cause?

A: Yes. According to the CNMI Labor's Employment Rules and Regulations, a foreign national worker may file a complaint with Labor's Administrative Hearing Office contesting a termination for cause. The Labor Director may investigate a termination to determine if the termination was in compliance with CNMI law and these regulations.

During the term of the contract, an employer or employee may terminate an approved employment contract for cause as defined in the contract. The Regulations state that an employer shall give written notice to the alien worker and to Labor on a standard form provided by Labor at least 10 days prior to the termination date.

■ ■ ■

Q: Can an employer and a foreign national worker terminate upon agreement their approved employment contract?

A: The Regulations state that an employer and employee may terminate an approved employment contract by consent during the term of the contract. The consent of the employee shall be evidenced by an appropriate writing filed with Labor at least 10 days prior to the termination date.

An approved employment is terminated automatically on the date of expiration of the term of the contract.

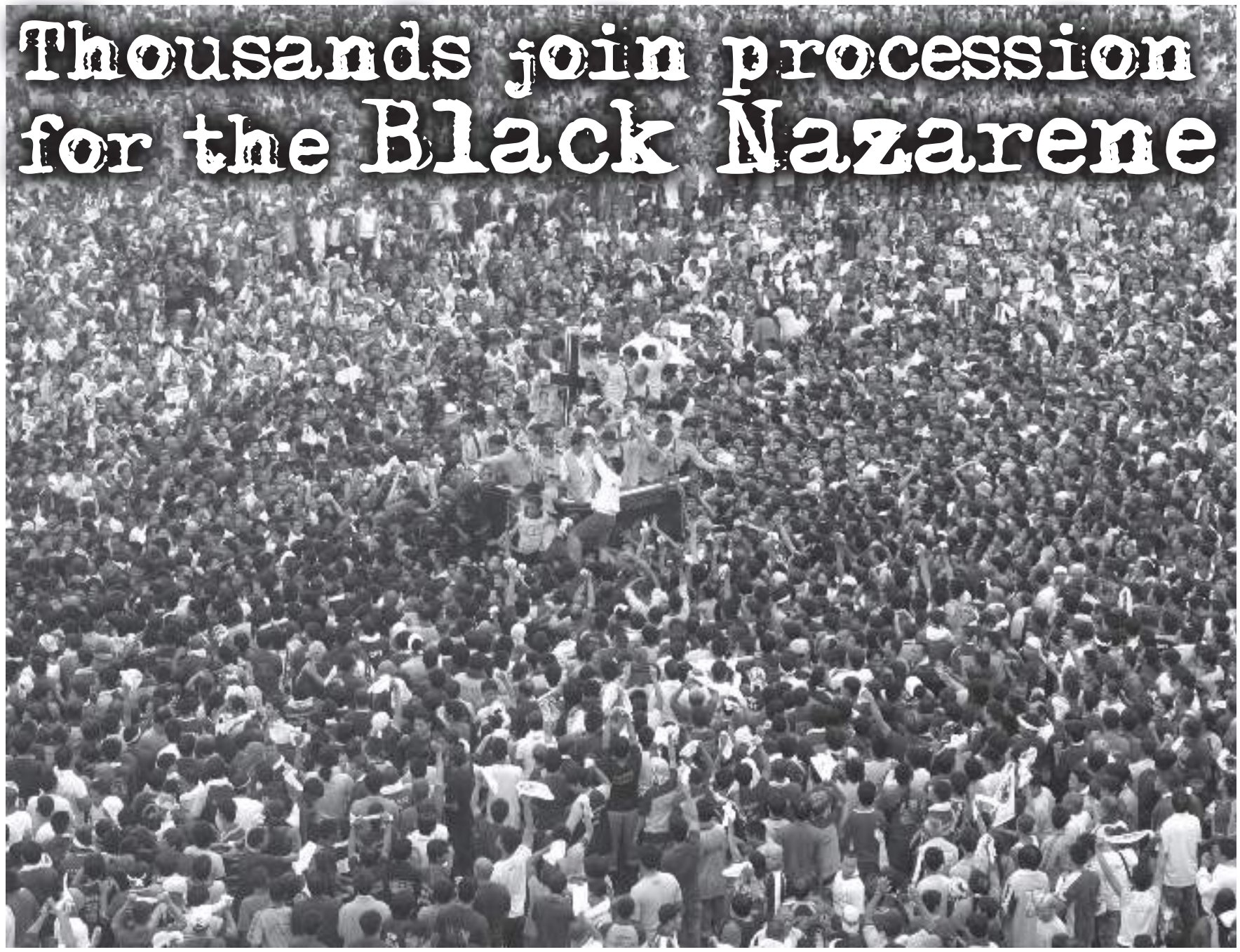
■ ■ ■

Q: When an employer terminates an alien worker, when does that employer's responsibility for medical expenses and repatriation end?

A: Under any termination of an approved employment contract, the Regulations state that the employer remains the last employer of record (responsible for medical expenses and repatriation) until that alien worker transfers to another employer, is repatriated, or in the case of medical expenses, a period of 96 days expires.

Disclaimer: Readers should conduct their own research and due diligence and obtain professional legal advice. Saipan Tribune will not be liable for any loss or damage caused by a reader's reliance on information obtained from this section. Submit questions on labor issues to Saipan Tribune via e-mail at editor@saipantribune.com, or by calling 235-6397, 235-2440, or 235-8747 and leaving a message at Ext. 133 or 135. You may also submit questions in person by writing it down and dropping it off at the Saipan Tribune's office on the second floor of the CIC Centre on Beach Road, Garapan.

Thousands join procession for the Black Nazarene



AP

Filipino barefoot devotees take part in a rowdy procession to celebrate the 402nd anniversary of the feast of the Black Nazarene Friday Jan. 9, 2009 in Manila, Philippines.

By HRVOJE HRANJSKI
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

MANILA, Philippines (AP)—Tens of thousands of Filipino Catholic devotees jammed the streets of the capital Friday, throwing handkerchiefs and surging forward for a chance to touch a black statue of Jesus Christ that many believe can deliver miracles.

The annual procession honoring the 402-year-old image of Christ—known as the Black Nazarene—took a different route this year to give devotees more space and reduce the chance of stampede, which has sometimes marred past events.

The life-sized wooden figure—believed to have been brought by Spanish missionaries from Mexico in 1606—made its way through the streets of Manila in a cart pulled by plainclothes police officers as barefoot, mostly male devotees wearing traditional maroon shirts pushed against each other and stretched hands to get closer.

The cart was pulled on a rope on its way back to the downtown Quiapo church. During the past events, the statue was pulled around the church square, but this time organizers decided to take it first to a central park and through the city streets so more people would have a chance to see it.

Some 1,500 police were securing the procession. Police said the figure was fitted for the first time with a global positioning satellite device to make it easier to track.

Many believe the Black Nazarene holds mystical powers that can wash away sins or cure illnesses. People hurl towels or handkerchiefs to be wiped on the image.

"I believe that Nazarene will give me what I'm asking for," said Joselito Pagul, who turns up for the procession every year.

No police estimate of the crowd was immediately available, but radio and television reports put it at tens of thousands. Last year, about 80,000 took part and two people died.

The Spanish missionaries' ship that brought the original statue to the Philippines, a former colony, caught fire and the image was burned but survived as a testament to a unique brand of Catholicism that combines folk superstitions. The Philippines, Asia's most predominantly Christian nation, is 80 percent Catholic.

The archbishop of Manila, Cardinal Gaudencio Rosales, said many Filipinos are devoted to the Black Nazarene because they identify with him in the midst of poverty and suffering.

"They see Christ in themselves when they suffer from poverty and oppression," Rosales said at a dawn Mass. "In their devotion they see God's love for them amid all this misery."

At the Quiapo Church, thousands of devotees waited for the arrival of the image of the Black Nazarene.

Police said that as early as 4am Friday, thousands have lined up outside the church gates, crowding the side streets and occupying the entire stretch of Quezon Boulevard.

"Okay lang hindi makapasok basta marinig naming ang misa [It's okay even if we don't get inside the church, as long as we hear the Mass]," a devotee said.

Officials of Quiapo Church have asked devotees to line up in entering and leaving the church.

At the same time, communion lines have also been set up, with queues reaching as far back as Evangelista St.

Despite appeals by authorities, several devotees still brought their children.

Superintendent Roberto Rosales, Manila Police District chief, estimated that around 2.5 million devotees would participate in the event.

3 TALES OF DEVOTION

Why Filipinos revere the Black Nazarene

By THEA ALBERTO
INQUIRER.NET

MANILA, Philippines—Each year, on January 9, a literal flood of Filipino Catholics—last year, police estimated some 2.5 million—swamps Manila's Quiapo district to pay homage to the image of Nuestro Padre Jesus Nazareno, the Black Nazarene, in a unique display of religious fervor.

On this day, the life-sized, dark-skinned image of Christ bearing the cross is paraded on a "caroza" (carriage) drawn by maroon-clad male devotees from the Quiapo church, where it is enshrined, and back through a sea of devotees, many seeking answers to their prayers, or even a miracle, others in thanksgiving for favors granted.

Three devotees told INQUIRER.net why they come each year—one of them for a quarter of a century now—to a celebration that is physically taxing and even potentially dangerous to life and limb.

Edilberto Soleta, 60, credits the Nazarene for rescuing him from his addictions to drugs and sex.

Danilo Nacional has come to the feast of the Nazarene for the past 11 years, believing the image miraculously saved his son, who had been badly hurt in a vehicular accident.

This year is the 25th that fishball vendor Rick Manansala will be attending the feast of the Nazarene, to whom he attributes a more mundane but, to millions of poor Filipinos no less precious, gift, the education of his four children.

"Kahit napakahirap dahil sa sobrang siksikan at lagi kang parang madidisgrasya, kayang gawin [No matter how difficult it is because of the crowds and the potential danger, I manage to do it]," Nacional, 46, explained why he has braved being crushed in the throng of devotees, many of them barefoot, seeking a chance to touch the Nazarene or wipe it with handkerchiefs or towels they believe will preserve some of the miraculous powers of the image, which has survived fires that destroyed the Quiapo church in 1791 and 1929, the big earthquakes of 1645 and 1863, and the bombing of Manila in World War II.

"Noon napakarami kong bisyo, halos hindi ko na mabilang. Pero nakapagbagong-buhay ako dahil sa tulong ng Poong Nazareno [I had so many vices before, I could hardly count them. But my life changed through the help of the Lord Nazarene]," Soleta, who joined a vigil for the image at Luneta Park's Quirino Granstand Thursday night, said.

Soleta, 60, told of a life of drugs and mistresses, and marriage to two women.

At one point, he said he ordered one of his wives to get an abortion because they had no money to sustain their growing family.

"Nagawa ko 'yun [abortion] dahil hindi pa ako malapit sa Diyos. Ngayon pinagsisihan ko na lahat. Iniwan ako ng mga asawa ko, lumayo ang mga anak ko. Pero nanalig ang pananampalataya ko [I did that because I was not close to God. Now I regret everything. I was left by my wives, my children abandoned me. But my faith helped me overcome these]," said Soleta, a devotee for almost 10 years.

This was after a Catholic charismatic group in Malabon introduced Soleta to the Black Nazarene and his life changed for the better.

"Hindi kumpleto ang taon ko kapag hindi ako nakahawak sa tali ng prosesyon [My year is never complete unless I touch the rope of the procession]," he said, referring to the rope with which the carriage bearing the Nazarene is pulled.

Now that he believes he has God's forgiveness, Soleta has one more favor to ask the Nazarene—to see his four children.

Manansala, who never fails to attract double takes because he is a dead ringer for another, more famous, devotee, Vice President Noli de Castro, credits the Nazarene for getting him through difficult times.

To this day, the fishball vendor can still not believe how he managed to send his four children through school. One is now a nurse, two are computer technicians.

"Siguro ngayong taon ay wala na akong hiling dahil naibigay na niya lahat sa akin. Ang pag-aaral ng aking mga anak, nabigay na niya [Maybe this year I have nothing more to ask because he has given me everything. He has given me the education of my children]," Manansala said.

But Manansala said he will continue to come to the Nazarene's feast in thanksgiving for all the blessings he has received for more than two decades.

This year, Catholic officials, in an effort to lessen the dangers to devotees—last year, authorities said two people died in the crush—decided to change the route of the procession.

From the traditional kick-off from the Quiapo church, the procession's start has been moved to the Quirino Grandstand.

It is a sure bet that whatever the hardships and risks, devotees will keep on flocking to Quiapo each year to revere the Nazarene.

"Huwag tayong susuko, kung ano man ang ating hiling makikinig siya [Let's not give up, whatever we ask for he will listen]," Soleta said.

17 Filipinos reach Gaza-Israel border

By VERONICA UY
INQUIRER.NET

MANILA, Philippines—The third attempt to get Filipinos in Gaza out of the war-torn territory was successful, with the 17 who chose to leave reaching the Gaza-Israel border, the Department of Foreign Affairs said Thursday.

DFA Undersecretary for Migrant Workers Affairs Esteban Conejos said the Filipinos were among 250 foreigners who made it out Thursday.

The evacuation convoy of six buses was led by the International Committee of Red Cross.

"They have just arrived at the Erez Crossing," Conejos said in a text message Thursday afternoon.

He said Philippine Ambassador to Israel Petronila Garcia and her embassy team are at the Gaza-Israel border to meet the evacuees and ferry them to the Allenby Crossing at the Israel-Jordan border.

Among the Filipino evacuees are three families and one nun. There were a total of 108 Filipinos in Gaza before hostilities broke out between Israel and Hamas militants.

Two earlier attempts to get the Filipinos out failed because the evacuees' safety could not be assured in the face of Israeli attacks.

Like the second evacuation attempt, Thursday's operation had the Canadian embassy coordinating and acting as focal point for embassies in Tel Aviv.

Protesters display "Stop Bombing" slogans during a rally at the Israeli Embassy at Manila's financial district of Makati city, Philippines, Thursday, Jan. 8, 2009. AP

Madagascar needs OFWs—recruiters

By VERONICA UY
INQUIRER.NET

MANILA, Philippines—Skilled Filipino mine workers may find golden opportunities in the Republic of Madagascar, a consultant for labor recruiters said.

Emmanuel Geslani said the island nation off the coast of southern Africa needs skilled mining workers such as electrical and instrumentation foremen, database administrators, control room specialists, lead hands, maintenance engineers, metallurgical supervisors, and ore preparation foremen and operators.

Geslani said this was learned during marketing missions by recruitment agencies when other traditional markets for overseas Filipino workers, such as Taiwan, closed.

He said last December, Jerphi Overseas and Trading Corp. managed to meet with international companies contracted to build new mines and processing plants for nickel ore and gold so that they could fill various positions in the mining industry with Filipino manpower.

"Madagascar, which was a former French colony, is the fourth largest island in the world and is rich in mineral resources which the government is now trying to develop in partnership with giant mining companies from Canada and the United States," he said.

Geslani said Filipino workers specializing in mining have a great chance of finding work in Madagascar, where salaries are competitive and departure is guaranteed within six weeks of application for those with experience and complete documents.

"Former mining workers from closed mines and operations in the country are very much welcome to apply with Jerphi at their office in Unit 219, Aurora Plaze Building 2, J. Bocobo and Arquiza Streets, Ermita, Manila. Their email address is admin@jerphi.com and they are accepting applicants during office hours from 9 a.m. up to 6 a.m.," Geslani said.

7 jailed for theft in Saudi await repatriation

By JOEY A. GABIETA
VISAYAS BUREAU

TACLOBAN CITY, Philippines—At least seven Filipino overseas workers, three of them from Leyte, continue to languish in a deportation center in Saudi Arabia after serving a five-month jail term for theft.

The seven were imprisoned on charges of theft, said Alberto Peñaflor, administrative officer of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration in Eastern Visayas (OWWA 8).

"Based on the report that we have received, they were charged with the theft of a bronze cable by their employers," Peñaflor said on Thursday.

Peñaflor identified the seven OFWs as Rafe Red, Luwie Castillo, Ronnie Suarez, Jaime Castro, Jonis Basijas, Rodel Cajalne and Reynaldo Etay.

He said Basijas, Cajalne and Etay are all from Leyte. Etay is from Ormoc City, Cajalne from Alangalang town and Basijas, from Palo town. The addresses of the four others were not known, he said.

The OWWA 8 official said that the seven were employed with the ASYAD International Communications in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia as technicians.

The sketchy information obtained by OWWA 8 from its central office revealed that the alleged theft took place on June 10, 2008. A local court sentenced the seven OFWs to serve five months in prison.

They were supposed to have been released sometime November 2008 and were transferred to the Damman Deportation Center after serving their sentence. No other details on matters involving the seven OFWs were known, Peñaflor said.

He said the government was aware of the plight of these OFWs and would extend assistance to them.

In fact, he said, the government would provide plane tickets to the seven so that they could return home. But he could not say when the workers could fly back home.

Effort to contact the wife of Etay, Arlene, through the telephone number she gave to the OWWA proved futile as the phone number was "no longer in service."

Experts: Ebola Reston virus found in pigs may pose health risk to humans

MANILA, Philippines (AP)—Animal and health experts said Wednesday they were conducting an investigation in the Philippines to determine whether the Ebola Reston virus recently discovered in pigs poses a threat to human health.

About a dozen experts from the U.N., the World Health Organization and the World Organization for Animal Health were invited to Manila to help the government investigate the virus, first identified in October in the northern Philippines.

The discovery not only marked the first time the virus has been found outside of monkeys, but also the first time it has been found in swine, a food-producing animal.

Those factors make the mission "particularly important," said a joint statement by the investigating organizations.

"We hope to identify the risks certainly for animal health and human health, if there are any," said Dr. Juan Lubroth of the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization and head of the Manila mission.

Authorities say the Ebola Reston virus—first discovered among crab-eating monkeys south of Manila in 1989—has caused no known illness among humans.

Ebola's three other subtypes—the Zaire, Sudan and Cote d'Ivoire strains—can cause deadly hemorrhagic fever in humans, according to WHO.

TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR MONEY

Starting over in 2009

Editor's Note: This is part of Take Charge of Your Money, a partnership between INQUIRER.net and Citibank to help readers handle their personal finances well.

Question: Year 2009 is already here and it's time for New Year's resolutions once again. Please give us tips on how we can handle our finances better this year especially since the world is experiencing a financial crisis. – Jim

Answer: It takes planning to achieve any goal, especially those for financial well-being. A good financial plan can help you meet your financial goals this coming year. With the financial crisis affecting many countries, we should all resolve to handle our finances better.

Here are our top 10 ways to start over financially this 2009. Make them your New Year's resolutions and make extra effort to observe them throughout the year. You won't regret it.

1. Make the budget your best friend.

It's time to stop wondering where your money goes every month. To make sure you will have ample funds to meet your bills, make a budget. Simply write down all your bills then allot money for all of them before you get that latte or that new pair of shoes at the mall.

2. Save at least 10 percent of your income every month.

Allot this for your retirement and make sure not to spend this amount before you reach retirement age. By saving little by little every month, you will be able to build up a fund to finance your lifestyle at retirement. Deduct the 10 percent be from your gross income as much as possible.

3. Add to your income.

Put in a good performance every day and you may find yourself eligible for a promotion soon, which comes with a salary increase. Find ways to earn extra income as well such as teaching a subject or tutoring on weekends, baking cakes made to order, selling merchandise on the side, or even breeding dogs.

4. Pay the right taxes.

We often complain about the lack of infrastructure and social services in the country. Do your share and pay the right taxes so the government will have funds to use to improve their services.

5. Grow your savings.

Make your money work for you by parking it in places where it can earn a good amount of interest. Don't put all your money in your payroll or savings account. Put the bulk of it in other forms of investment that yield more, such as special time deposits, retail treasury bonds, unit investment trust funds or mutual funds. Your bank will be able to help you determine what investment would be suitable for you given your financial goals, your appetite for risk, and time period for investing. Have a chat with your bank manager.

6. Pare down debt.

If you have debt, be it credit card debt, auto loan or housing loan, do all you can to reduce the debt faster. Pay up earlier to save on interest expense. Don't add on more debt if your debt payments already rack up to one-third of your net income every month.

7. Don't miss paying a bill.

It's essential that you don't miss a bill payment to avoid late payment fees which will just add to your list of payables. Every time you receive a bill, mark the due date on your planner to make sure you won't forget about it. To save you time, consider enrolling your bills in the online, mobile or phone payment facility of your bank. Paying will be very easy then from the comfort of your home or office or even on the road.

8. Buy only what you need, and as much as possible, when it's on sale.

It's nice to have new things but if we don't really need them, they are a drain on finances and add to the clutter at home. Whenever you are poised to buy, think first if the item is a need or a want. Buy needs only; wants can be indulged in later on when funds allow it.

9. Live within your means.

You have heard this often said before, and that's because it works. Spend only as much as your income will allow. Going further than that will make you live on debt, spending money you have not earned.

10. Build up your emergency fund.

Because times can be uncertain, it pays to have a fund to dip into when something unfavorable happens: a job loss, a critical illness, etc. Aim to have an emergency fund that will cover three to six months' worth of expenses. Put this in an easily accessible account at the bank (e.g., time deposit, unit investment trust fund) or a financial company (e.g., mutual fund). It should be easily accessible, meaning you can get the money fast when you need it. Thus it should not be invested in assets like jewelry or real estate.

With these 10 resolutions, you will be able to manage your finances better. Print out this list and post it in a place where you can see it every day. We wish you the best in 2009!

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Maharlika – PinoyStyle

Assunta denies breaking up with Jules

By MARINEL CRUZ
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

MANILA, Philippines—Actress Assunta de Rossi on Wednesday denied a rumor that she had broken up with husband, former Negros Occidental Rep. Jules Ledesma, adding that they just celebrated their sixth wedding anniversary last month.

During the press conference of her TV show "U Women" Wednesday morning, the actress pleaded movie scribes to stop writing about the rumor.

"Wag n'yo na lang patulan [Don't pay attention to it]. We're together. 'Yun pa rin naman ang sasabihin ko sa inyo. Baka mainis lang kayo sa akin. [That will still be my answer. You might just get irritated with me]."

She added they celebrated their anniversary in Negros, in time for the blessing of the Ledesma's ethanol plant there. "We threw a party for the people who worked at the ethanol plant," the actress said.

Assunta continued: "There's no such thing as a perfect relationship. If I compare my marriage to that of my parents', baby pa ito. My Mommy tells me that she and Daddy have been married for almost 26 years but they still have petty fights."

Assunta de Rossi

Edu not bowing out of the 'Game'

By BAYANI SAN DIEGO JR.
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

MANILA, Philippines—Edu Manzano couldn't be more emphatic in denying the rumor that he resigned from the ABS-CBN show "Pilipinas, Game KNB?" over the holidays.

"No, that's not true," Manzano asserted. He said that the "farewell" spiel he delivered in an episode last month was an annual tradition.

"Every year, I thank the audience for welcoming me to their homes," he explained.

He didn't deny, however, that his contract with the game show ended on Dec. 31.

"It's a yearly contract and it's really up for renewal," he noted.

Unfortunately, his manager, June Rufino, was confined in a hospital for a series of surgeries, he said. "June wasn't able to sit down and renegotiate the terms with [head of TV production] Cory Vidanes," Manzano said.

Even though he has yet to sign a contract, he still taped episodes on Dec. 30 and Jan. 5, he said.

He also insisted that the resignation rumor had nothing to do with the controversy involving director Wenn Deramas whose victory on the show was deemed dubious by a tabloid report.

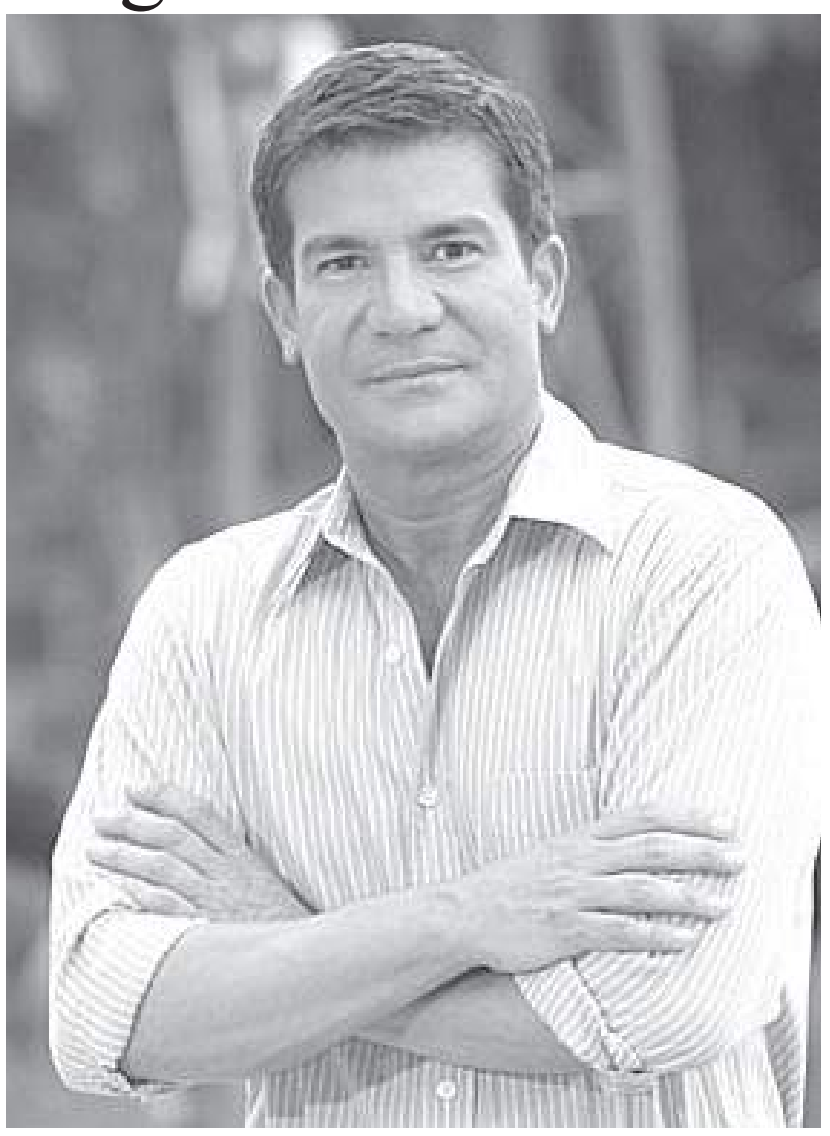
According to the scuttlebutt, Manzano made it easy for Deramas to win.

Manzano admitted that he got upset because the intrigue questioned his integrity and credibility as host.

A network insider claimed that Manzano had a disagreement with the show's staff over the gossip. "It's the second time he was put on the spot," said the source.

Earlier, contestant Wendy Valdez complained and raised a ruckus because Manzano had deemed her answer unacceptable in an episode of the show.

Manzano denied that he was squabbling with the show's staff. "I've always said that one of the reasons the show has become successful is because the staff and I work well together," he said.


Edu Manzano has denied the rumor that he resigned from the ABS-CBN show "Pilipinas, Game KNB?" over the holidays.

If there's one thing he's not denying, it's his son Luis Manzano's romantic relationship with Angel Locsin.

He said he's all-thumbs-up for the pair.

"They look good together," Manzano said, adding that he wouldn't mind becoming a grandfather soon.

"Unlike Luis' mom [Batangas Gov. Vilma Santos], I'm excited to be a lolo. I still want to be strong enough to carry my apo," he said, laughing.

Manzano, who is also the Optical Media Board chief, is set to make a cameo in Gov. Santos and the younger Manzano's upcoming movie with Star Cinema, the tentatively titled "A Mother's Story." He is also in the cast of Peque Gallaga's digital movie with APT/Directors' Guild, "Agaton & Mindy."

Record-breaking year for MMFF

By BAYANI SAN DIEGO JR.
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

MANILA, Philippines—It has been a record-breaking year for the Metro Manila Film Festival.

Total earnings for the two-week festival, which started on Dec. 25 last year and ended on Wednesday, reached an all-time high of P450 million—the biggest single-year gross in the 34-year history of the MMFF.

The 2008-09 take surpassed the 2006 record of P415 million.

The total gross was 20 percent higher than the 2007 MMFF, which posted a P380.3-M aggregate, according to Dominic Du, member of the screening committee of the film fest.

Star Cinema's "Ang Tanging Ina N'yong Lahat" is the top-grossing entry, earning P171 million. The film eclipsed its first installment, "Tanging Ina," which made P170 million in 2003, according to Malou Santos, Star Cinema managing director.

Santos told the Philippine Daily Inquirer: "In times of crisis, people want to be entertained and watch comedy movies."

De las Alas, "Tanging Ina" lead star, agreed: "Napakahirap na ng buhay ngayon, kaya for a movie to make over P100 million in seven days is a miracle. Divine intervention ito."

"Ang Tanging Ina N'yong Lahat" earned P107 million on the seventh day of the two-week festival.

The second top grossing film, OctoArts/M-Zet/APT's "Iskul Bukol: 20 Years After" that reunited the trio of Tito, Vic and Joey on the big screen, also surpassed the P100 million mark with a P107 million take.

At third place is the tenth installment of a horror franchise, Regal's "Shake, Rattle & Roll X," with P68 million.

Regal's other entry, "Desperadas 2" was at fourth place with P49.3 million. Viva Films' multi-award winning period film "Baler" took P35.8 million and placed fifth. OctoArts Films' "One Night Only" stood at sixth with P10.5 million while the animated film "Dayo sa Mundo ng Elementalia" garnered seventh place with P5.6 million. Maverick Films' "Magkaibigan" ended up last with P2.1 million.

The total earnings for this year's film fest (P450M) is just P50 million shy of the target set by MMFF and Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) chair Bayani Fernando, according to Ric Camaligan, film fest executive committee member and head of the National Cinema Association of the Philippines.

In an earlier interview, Fernando told the Inquirer that this year's "mix of commercial and quality films is bringing the film fest closer to the P500 million target."

The MMDA spearheads the annual film fest.

Lessons celebs learned from 2008

By DOLLY ANNE CARVAJAL
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

MANILA, Philippines—Do you know where your 365 days went and where it led you? As we embark on a whole new journey this 2009, are we armed with enough lessons from 2008?

Quigaman

Did the celebs learn what they needed to learn? There is no better teacher than love and pain. Whether your heart is on a crash course or pursuing a master's degree, make sure it does its homework well.

Cheers to less tears and no fears! Look at life in the eye and say, "2009 is gonna be mine!"

ARNEL PINEDA (Journey): "The biggest eye-opener in '08 for me was finding out who my real friends are. And also, a stronghold on faith pays off no matter what."

KARYLLE: "I finally understood in '08 what 'in God's time' means. I've just learned to be more diligent in my prayers. I need to pray as often as I can this year."

DENNIS TRILLO: "I learned in '08 that I' vegot to have faith, be brave and face my own demons. There is nothing to fear but fear itself."

PRECIOUS LARA QUIGAMAN: "My experiences in 2008 taught me to fight for what I know is right even if it's the hardest thing to do and despite of what anyone else says."

DIETHER OCAMPO: "2008 taught me to free myself from the bondage of misery and hate that kept my dreams from coming true. I must enjoy the freedom of living my life according to how God planned it. I should share the seeds of love to help rebuild a future that would be at its greatest."

ALFRED VARGAS: "I found out in '08 that the only way to find true happiness is through love and faith. Love brings out the best in us and faith keeps us strong. This '09, all my endeavors, personal and professional, will be sparked by love and fueled by faith. It's not going to be easy but I know it's worth the try."

MARIEL RODRIGUEZ: "The biggest thing I learned in '08 is that intrigues will always come but it's how you handle issues that matter. You can let it affect you or you can just let it go. This year I will choose my battles."

CHRISTIAN BAUTISTA: "'08 reminded me that this life is not about me."

ARA MINA: "I have learned to be more patient and forgiving. I refuse to stress myself because of negative intrigues. I will face them in a mature manner. Sa show biz 'di mo alam kung sino ang totoo sa 'yo at hindi. I'll sharpen my instincts so I can weed out people who have a hidden agenda sa akin this '09."

BENJIE PARAS: "Never let go of opportunities whether big or small."

RACHEL ALEJANDRO: "Last year I learned that even the most impossible of situations can be overcome. I need to act upon the things in my life I want to change because no one else will do it for me."

NINA: "Whatever happens, there's no turning back. Just moving forward."

SUNSHINE CRUZ: "I realized that there's a big difference between reacting and responding. It is smarter to respond than be in control of my emotions. It's true that what angers you, conquers you. I promise that I will conquer '09 with positivity, productivity, compassion and love."

POKWANG: "'08 taught me how to be forgiving para magaan ang pasok ng '09 and pagtitipid ng konti para maganda ang future naming mag-ina."

Maharlika – Opinyon

EDITORIAL

Gray areas

We cannot repeat often enough that what is legal isn't necessarily what is right. Put another way, while the law may require meeting a high standard of evidentiary proof to be met before imposing a penalty on someone accused of wrongdoing, society has every right to impose sanctions on individuals who hold public office for merely committing the appearance of impropriety. Officials regularly complain that this is a double standard, and it is, but then every child knows the line from Spiderman: "With great power comes great responsibility."

This is what our officials refuse to see. Their blindness in the face of a simple rule of thumb concerning official behavior is the cause of the disrepute in which officialdom tends to be held. What our officials refuse to acknowledge is that in a country in which the rule of law is more often than not determined by the power of the purse, legal processes themselves are not sufficient to produce justice. The processes have to be facilitated by self-control on the part of officials, and encouraged by the watchfulness of the citizenry.

Take the case of Justice Undersecretary Ricardo Blancaflor. He took a call from the family of Richard Brodett, who was facing an investigation for drug dealing. He took it because he knew the parents of Brodett. He took it upon himself to inquire as to the status of the case, when "inquiries" by officials have become notorious as instances of influence peddling. Blancaflor, by all accounts, is widely respected. He may have acted on the principle that justice delayed is justice denied. But these are times when deviating from official procedures by resorting to the gray areas, in which officialdom often tries to find ways to humanize the inexorable harshness of the law, has become increasingly impermissible.

The public has an increasing intolerance for such cases of official consideration because it has come to expect a more impersonal, and thus, equitable, approach to the justice process. We all know our institutions are understaffed and overworked. What we expect is the democracy of the queue and of not jumping the line merely on some official's (well-intentioned or not) say-so.

The same applies to the behavior of officials who seem to be under the impression that what constitutes wrongdoing is only what can be proven in court, after a tremendous amount of money and time is spent on litigation. That a crime, to be worthy of punishment, requires being caught on the spot with a smoking gun. Anything else constitutes a gray area in which official wrongdoing can be hidden under the presumption of legality.

A modern, democratic society substitutes official discretion and similar gray areas, for a fussy, often slow, and tedious devotion to doing everything by the book. Blancaflor is simply the latest example of the adjustments officials—and not just the public—have to endure, if we are to eliminate the more flexible but highly corruptible present for a more orderly and fair future.

The most important thing

There's The Rub

By CONRADO DE QUIROS

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

I remember a joke someone told me once: A couple who couldn't have a child sought the advice of a doctor. The doctor gave them all sorts of fertility pills and prescribed a regimen of diet and exercise guaranteed to bring about the desired effect. At the end of six months, they still could not produce a child, and so they went back to the doctor.

The doctor ticked off the items he had prescribed to them, and the couple said yes to all of them. The doctor was dismayed and attributed the case to just bad luck or bad genes. Then, just as the couple was about to go away, the doctor asked: "By the way, how often do you have sex?"

The couple answered, "What is that?"

I remembered this joke curiously enough in connection with Charter change. The House of Representatives is currently debating whether to effect it by way of con-ass [constituent assembly] or con-con [constitutional convention]. Some administration representatives, like Victor Ortega of La Union, say it's too late for con-ass. The better tack is a constitutional convention whose members should be elected in the regular presidential elections of 2010. This has the virtue of more easily passing through the Senate, which is sure to oppose con-ass or any attempt to extend term limits.

But change the Constitution we must, they say. Ortega, who was himself a con-con delegate in 1971, says he is not averse to con-ass "as long as we achieve the constitutional reforms we need."

My question remains: Why change the Constitution at all?

The expectations from the con-con of 1971 were equally momentous. The call for changing the Constitution itself did not come from Marcos but from the activists who wanted to change "a colonial document" into one that would truly make the country free (from "US imperialism") and democratic (from the "oligarchs").

Looking back, you have to wonder if that wasn't quixotic. From the beginning the exercise was doomed. Despite all sorts of safeguards to make sure the elections would be "non-political," or would not be an extension of dynastic politics, a law expressly banning from running people related by several degrees of affinity or consanguinity to current officials, most of the winners turned out to be extensions of existing political dynasties. The con-con did produce a group of Young Turks—Raul Roco, Bobbit Sanchez, Nene Pimentel, etc.—but the bulk of it was more of the same.

Whether the 1971 Constitution could have wrought dramatic changes on the country or not is academic now. Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law and wrought a dramatic—and profoundly tragic—change upon the country. He manufactured his own Constitution, after jailing 11 of the Young and Not-So-Very-Young Turks, with help from the remaining—and much bought or cowed—con-con delegates. Though he was a stickler for the Constitution and referred to it at every turn, even calling martial law "constitutional authoritarianism," nobody really paid any attention to it. It might as well not have been there.

The 1987 Constitution also raised heroic expectations. It was produced in the first place to make martial law, or dictatorial rule, impossible in future, "Never again!" being the cry of that day. The new Constitution did manage to delete the draconian portions of the one it replaced, which vested absolute powers on the ruler. And it did manage to restore liberal democracy, or the kind of democracy we knew before martial law, good and bad, to the country. But it didn't do much else. Certainly, it did not stop the rape and the pillage and the human rights abuses, all of which flourished right after Marcos departed. And today, we're right back where we started, or where the con-con of 1971 started: faced with the ambitions of an unscrupulous ruler to keep power. The dictatorial rule is there already, albeit disguised in robes not unlike "constitutional authoritarianism." "Never again!" has become "Again and Again!"

That brings me to the connection between the joke above and Charter change. It's quite simply this: You do not have sex and you are not going to have a baby, unless you are God and can induce immaculate conception. Even Zeus had sex with Leda to produce Helen, though it's a wonder why any woman would consent to do it with a swan. But that's another story. You do not follow the Constitution, and you are not going to have change, unless you have a Moses to send lightning bolts in your direction when you go astray. The Constitution is just fertility pills and a regimen of diet and exercise, the sex is obeying it, practicing it, embodying it.

The Constitution is not just a piece of paper, it is something that constitutes. It means nothing if it is found only in a glass-encased document. It means something only when it is found in our sinews, in our lifeblood, in our hearts and minds.

The Constitution is not the problem, we are the problem. For us, there seems to be no visible connection between producing a Constitution and obeying it. Just like for us there seems no visible connection between holding Senate hearings on corruption and punishing the guilty. Producing a constitution and holding Senate hearings have become ends in themselves. Whether it's the colonial 1935 Constitution, the aborted 1971 Constitution, the abortion that is the 1973 Constitution, the reformist 1987 Constitution, or the brave new Constitution of 2010 or 2050, none of it is going to matter unless we are willing to live it. Unless we are willing to stop the summary executions of presumed communists, unless we are willing to stop the rape and pillage, unless we are truly determined to never make dictatorship happen again.

First, let us enforce the law, then let us change it.

Everything else is just trying to make a baby without the most joyful part of it.

Rizal beyond the image

Looking Back

By AMBETH OCAMPO

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Rizal Day came and went as usual without much fuss, except in Rizal Park, where Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile presided over the ceremonies. But then, of course, the President was in La Union yet again for Rizal Day. Everyone is swept up by Christmas and New Year to notice.

I missed writing yet another front-page article for Rizal Day because I was, believe it or not, in a place that had no Internet connection. There are people who think we should wear long faces and commemorate Dec. 30 with somber thoughts of death, martyrdom and "Ultimo Adios." I would rather that people read Rizal's novels and discuss them instead of repeating stock phrases and praises that have numbed our youth. Better yet, try and read Rizal's other writings, those that were not forced on you in school.

If you know a bit about Rizal, have some idea about his life and the plots of his novels, it would be fruitful to browse though the little-known volumes in the 25-volume complete compilation of Rizal's writings. My favorite volumes in the series are: "Rizal's Prose" (Vol. III Book 2 of the "Writings of Jose Rizal" series published by the Jose Rizal National Centennial Commission in 1962, which has been frequently reprinted in our time by the National Historical Institute) and "Miscellaneous Writings of Jose Rizal." The former is a collection of writings, many of which we were never taught in school, while the latter is a mixed bag ranging from his medical notebooks, "Rules for the Determination of the Dimensions of Parapets," to a list of shells he collected in Dapitan. "Rizal's Prose" is basically on his literary works while "Miscellaneous Writings" is just that: stray pieces on a variety of topics not easily classified—notes on Tagalog orthography, the treatment of the bewitched (or how to cure a victim of a "mangkukulam"), and one of the few articles that Rizal originally wrote in English, which is his re-telling of the famous Philippine folktale "The Monkey and the Turtle."

If you are so inclined, there are separate volumes for his letters, another for his poetry. The schoolmaster's favorite is the one devoted to his political and historical writings.

In "Miscellaneous Writings," everything is translated from the original Spanish or French or Tagalog into English and the compilation has thus misled some into concluding that Rizal wrote some fairy tales, including "The Ugly Duckling," because the compiler forgot to mention that these tales by Hans Christian Andersen were translated into Tagalog and illustrated by Rizal for his nephews and nieces. These are best read in Rizal's original Tagalog. His charming translation of "Thumbelina" is "Si Gahinlalaki" and "The Ugly Duckling" is rendered as "Ang Pangit na Sisiu ng Pato."

It is truly unfortunate that a hero who left so many writings is so seldom read by his people. Maybe we have become so conditioned to associate Rizal with nationalism and holidays that we forget he can be an engaging writer on a wide range of topics. To read him is to rediscover not just another aspect of the hero but a way to understand ourselves as Filipinos.

Sometimes he can be cryptic, such as when he says, "Hay mas dias que longanisas (There are more days than longanisas)," which is a phrase whose context is lost on us today. Then there is yet another cryptic parable that can be relevant to those who like to involve lawyers and get tangled in lawsuits. Rizal wrote:

Once, two friends found a clam near the sea. They debated as to who would have it.

"I," one said, "saw it first."

"But I picked it up," replied his friend.

They went to court and asked the judge to settle the question. The judge opened the shell, ate the meat, and divided the shell between the litigants.

It is a reminder to people who are fond of resorting to the courts of justice.

Another unfinished story or novel is quite similar to George Orwell's "Animal Farm." First published in 1946, Orwell set the story in a place called Manor Farm, renamed Animal Farm after a successful revolt of the animals that drove out the humans. The leader of the animals was a pig named Napoleon.

In Rizal's story, the leader of the animals is also a pig named Botiok. In this farm there lived an efficient farmhand named Suan who produced healthy and productive animals. One day, for some unknown reason, the animals turned sickly. Egg production dropped, the turkeys lost the sheen on their feathers and the other animals grew thin. This was strange, because there was no epidemic of animal disease at the time. The narrator, who was born on St. Solomon's Day, had the gift of understanding the language of animals, so he climbed and hid in a macopa tree to eavesdrop on the animals. He discovered that the animals, like humans, had a social structure of their own, with the pig at the head of their society. It is unfortunate that Rizal did not complete this story to educate and entertain us further.

When people ask why Rizal always seems relevant and interesting to me, I reply that if we want to understand Rizal and ourselves, we must go beyond the image in our monuments and textbooks to unravel the complexity of a man who mirrors a lot of what we are and what we wish for.

Comments are welcome at aocampo@ateneo.edu.

Maharlika – Samu't Sari

30TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

REY BELGADO

Mr. Lito and Mrs. Malou Mendoza, owner of Traders Insurance, Tropex Garden Co. Ltd. and L&M Enterprises, celebrates their 30th wedding anniversary at their residence in Finasisu on Dec. 31, 2008. Here are some photos from that event.

REY BELGADO

Pauline and the other kids pose for a picture.

BIRTHDAY BASH

Pauline Xandra Castro, left, celebrates her 8th birthday at her parents' house on Navy Hill on Dec. 6. She is shown here with her sister Jaime Castro.

REY BELGADO

REY BELGADO

Bong holds the kids and Pauline while playing parlor games during Pauline's birthday party.

Young Style

African-Americans built many of Washington's landmarks

By VALERIE STRAUSS
(C) 2009, THE WASHINGTON POST

Everybody knows that on Jan. 20, Barack Obama will take the oath of office in front of the U.S. Capitol to become the first African-American president of the United States.

What many people may not know is the big role that African-Americans had in building the Capitol and many other historic places in Washington.

Jesse Holland, a reporter for the Associated Press, wrote a book called "Black Men Built the Capitol," about African-American history in and around the nation's capital. Here are some stories.

THE WASHINGTON POST

Lincoln Park in Washington was the first park named to honor Abraham Lincoln after his 1865 assassination. A Lincoln statue was dedicated in 1876, paid for almost entirely by freed slaves.

The U.S. Capitol

The home of Congress was built by a workforce that was made up largely of slaves. They baked bricks used for the building's foundation and walls. They sawed lumber, dug trenches and put down the stones that hold up the Capitol to this day.

Many of the slaves are believed to have come from houses and farms in Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia. Before the 1861-65 Civil War, Virginia was the largest slaveholding state, with a little more than 400,000 slaves. (In part because of that history, the fact that a majority of Virginia's voters supported Obama in the presidential election was seen as important.) There were about 100,000 slaves in Maryland and more than 3,000 in the District.

The Statue of Freedom

This is the 19-foot-6-inch statue that stands on top of the Capitol dome. A slave named Philip Reid figured out how to bronze the plaster cast (which was made in Rome) in pieces and then put it together so it could be hoisted onto the building.

The White House

THE WASHINGTON POST

Jesse Holland, a reporter for the Associated Press, wrote a book called "Black Men Built the Capitol," about African-American history in and around the nation's capital. African-Americans played a big role in building the Capitol and many other historic places in Washington.

Slaves played a big role in constructing this building, too. And until the Civil War, many presidents had slaves.

The Mall

Today this big piece of land runs through downtown Washington, linking the Lincoln Memorial to the Capitol. Museums, monuments, buildings and open spaces can be found there. But before the Civil War, this area held markets where slaves were bought and sold.

On the spot where the National Archives is located, there was a well-known slave market called Lloyd's Tavern, where a young girl named Margaret was seized from her master and sold because he was behind in his rent.

The Archives holds the country's most important documents, including President Abraham Lincoln's original Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, which freed the slaves in Southern states that were not under Union control.

Lincoln Park

Located in Washington on East Capitol Street between 11th and 13th streets, this was the first park named to honor Lincoln after his 1865 assassination. During the Civil War, the area had housed Union soldiers and a hospital.

A Lincoln statue was dedicated in 1876, paid for almost entirely by freed slaves. The idea for it came from a freed Virginia slave named Charlotte Scott, who donated the first $5 using the very first money she earned as a free woman.

Washington and African-Americans

(c) 2009, The Washington Post

There are more than 200 important African-American history sites throughout Washington. You can explore them, with help at www.culturaltourismdc.org.

Baby dolls raise a stink

By BRIGID SCHULTE
(C) 2008, THE WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON—So long, Betsy Wetsy. Baby dolls just got a whole lot more real.

Put her on her little pink plastic toilet. Press the purple bracelet on Baby Alive Learns to Potty. "Sniff sniff," she chirps in a singsong voice. "I made a stinky!"

Last holiday season's animatronic Baby Alive—which retails for $59.99—comes with special "green beans" and "bananas" that, once fed to the doll, actually, well, come out the other end. "Be careful," reads the doll's promotional literature, "just like real life, sometimes she can hold it until she gets to the `potty' and sometimes she can't!" (A warning on the back of the box reads: "May stain some surfaces.")

The mess made by the $39.95 Little Mommy Real Loving Baby Gotta Go Doll, ("Over 60 phrases and fun sounds!") is more hypothetical. Once she is placed on her little toilet, a magnet triggers a presto, change-o in the plastic bowl: "The `water' in the toilet disappears, with the expected `potty waste' appearing in its place," says manufacturer Mattel. "Your child can then flush the toilet. The `water' will reappear, while the toilet makes a very realistic flushing sound!" And then comes the applause.

The dolls, which are being heavily advertised on television, are expected to be the season's big sellers. Since the dolls were introduced to stores this fall, managers at Wal-Mart, Target and Toys R Us have reported trouble keeping them in stock. And Baby Alive, listed as one of the Hot Toys of 2008 by Hottoys2008.com, was sold out at Wal-Mart, eToys.com and the AOL shopping site a week before Christmas.

THE WASHINGTON POST

Last holiday season's animatronic Baby Alive comes with special "green beans" and "bananas" that, once fed to the doll, actually, well, come out the other end. And they're selling like hotcakes.

But not everyone thinks dolls need to be (begin ital) this (end ital) real. Some things, they argue, are better left to the imagination. This battle over whether pooping dolls are an appropriate toy is only the latest skirmish in a long war between child development experts and toymakers. Psychologists say the best toys encourage children to pretend and use make-believe (witness the fact that children often love the boxes their expensive toys come in more than the toy itself). But toymakers want to use the latest technology to make and sell ever-more realistic toys. (Baby Alive's movements are the result of sophisticated robotics controlled by the same kind of microprocessor that navigates satellites and runs nuclear power plants.)

"Retailers have bought heavily into these dolls," said Reyne Rice, trend specialist with the Toy Industry Association. "They feel that these are some of the more popular items for girls this year." Although most baby dolls are sold in the last six weeks of the year and firm sales figures won't be available until early next year, Rice said indicators look good for big Christmas sales.

The buzz is on parent online discussion groups across the country. As with the Tickle Me Elmo and Cabbage Patch Kids crazes of Christmases past, one mother was so distraught that the pooping dolls were sold out online just after Thanksgiving that she prepared to rise at 5 a.m. to scour stores in a 100-mile radius of her house.

At a Toys R Us in Northern Virginia last week, Salma Bangoura filled her shopping cart with stainless steel pots and pans for her 7-year-old daughter's play kitchen. Her daughter desperately wants the Baby Alive, she said, and Bangoura is considering buying it for her for Christmas. "She wants the toilet," she said, shrugging. "It's so interesting. It comes with its own food. It's not gross, as long as it's not real."

Football teams come down to the wire

By FRED BOWEN
Special to The Washington Post

Bowen is an author of sports novels for kids.

It's a great time to be a football fan.

Some of the most important pro games are being played in the next few days. Let's take a look at the big matchups:

NFC playoffs

The defending Super Bowl champion New York Giants look like a cinch to return to the Super Bowl as the National Football Conference champions. The Giants have everything a team needs to win: two powerful 1,000-yard rushers in Brandon Jacobs and Derrick Ward, a tough defense and Eli Manning, a quarterback who already has a Super Bowl ring.

In addition, the other teams in the NFC playoffs—the Carolina Panthers, Philadelphia Eagles and Arizona—are not that great. I know the Giants lost some games at the end of the season, but I don't see them losing any in the next two weeks.

AFC playoffs

Picking the American Football Conference winner is much harder. Every AFC team is tough. Even the San Diego Chargers, who have a so-so record of nine wins and eight losses, are red-hot, having won five games in a row.

I like the Pittsburgh Steelers' chances to go to the Super Bowl in Tampa, Fla., on Feb. 1. The Steelers have Ben Roethlisberger at quarterback. Like Eli Manning, Roethlisberger has already won a Super Bowl.

But the real reason I like Pittsburgh is their defense. It's the best in the National Football League, allowing fewer than 14 points a game.

Be sure to keep an eye on my favorite Pittsburgh defender, Number 43, safety Troy Polamalu. You won't see his name on the back of his jersey, because Polamalu's long hair sticks out of his helmet and covers the letters. Polamalu says a prayer before every play and plays with such wild abandon that he is always around the ball.

My guess is that Pittsburgh's Number 43 will be going to Super Bowl XLIII.

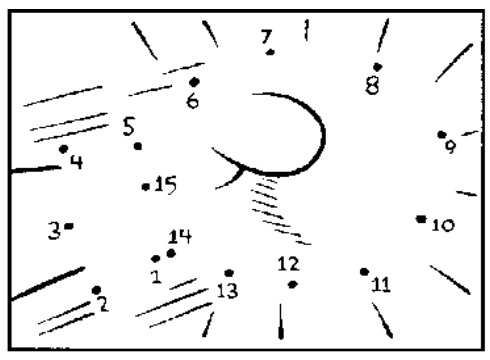
College Football Fact

(c) 2009, The Washington Post

Only one person has twice won the Heisman Trophy, the most prestigious award given each year to the best college football player: running back Archie Griffin of Ohio State University. He won in 1974 and 1975.

Junior Whirl

by Charles Barry Townsend



CONNECT THE DOTS and find out what soft-drink prizefighters like best!

Answers: Punch.

Illustrated by David Coulson

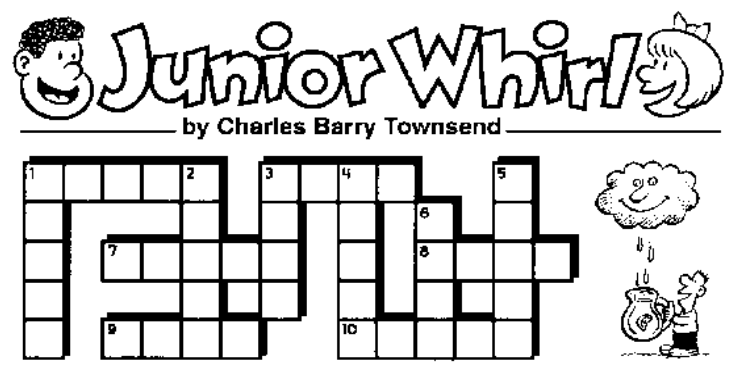
THE BAFFLING BALLADEER!

Answer: "Clef."

LINK-UPS! Here's a list of 12 small words that are div d-ed into two columns. Turn them into six longer words by linking them together. To do this, draw a line from a word in the left column to a word in the right column.

1.	ACRE	PING
2.	CAR	ALLY
3.	BROW	DISH
4.	DELI	AGE
5.	GLOB	VERY
6.	BRAN	SING

Answers: 1. Acreage. 2. Carping. 3. Browsing. 4. Delivery. 5. Globally. 6. Brandish.



WEATHER REPORT!

Below are 12 words you might use year-round when talking about the weather. Use these words to complete the puzzle grid above. Use the trial-and-error method; erasers are optional.

4-letter words	5-letter words
ARID	FROST
BLEW	FROZE
BURN	MOIST
GALE	RAINS
MIST	SHADE
	SWEAT
	THAWS

Answers: (Across) 1. Frost. 3. Bum. 7. Shade. 8. Air. 9. Mist. 10. Sweat. (Down) 1. Froze. 2. Thaws. 3. Blew. 4. Rains. 5. Moist. 6. Gale.

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Strange BUT TRUE

By Samantha Weaver

■ Those who paint their fingernails these days tend to choose the color on a whim. In ancient China, though, it was a much more serious matter: The color of your fingernails was an indication of your social rank.

■ It was newsman Dan Rather who made the following sage observation: "Americans will put up with anything, provided it doesn't block traffic."

■ Here's something to consider the next time your allergies start acting up: It's been reported that the force of the air movement generated by a sneeze can reach more than 100 miles per hour.

■ In 19th-century England, one Dr. William Palmer was suspected of going on a killing spree, poisoning his mother-in-law, his wife, his brother, five of his children and at least two people to whom he owed money. He was finally brought to trial for the murder of his friend John Parsons Cook, who had become violently ill and then died after having dinner at Palmer's home. Palmer was convicted and sentenced to be hanged. As he was mounting the gallows, witnesses claim that Palmer looked at the trapdoor and exclaimed, "Are you sure it's safe?"

■ If you're ever lost in the wilderness of the eastern central part of North America, it might help to look for Silphium laciniatum, better known as the compass flower or compass plant. This perennial herb resembles the sunflower and can grow from 3 to 12 feet tall. The plant's usefulness is based on the fact that its leaves tend to orient themselves so that they point north and south.

■ ■ ■

Thought for the Day: "I like them to talk nonsense. That's man's one privilege over all creation. Through error you come to the truth! I am a man because I err! You never reach any truth without making fourteen mistakes, and very likely a hundred and fourteen."—Fyodor Dostoevsky

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MAGIC MAZE ● NEW — : PLACES

Y	W	T	Q	N	K	I	F	C	Z	W	U	R	P	M
J	S	Z	C	H	E	D	C	S	N	A	E	L	R	O
Z	X	E	A	U	Y	O	R	K	S	Q	N	L	J	Y
D	N	A	L	G	N	E	C	O	G	E	C	Z	X	E
V	T	L	E	A	R	I	P	N	F	L	J	H	L	S
E	C	A	D	N	W	A	Y	W	V	D	T	L	R	R
P	N	N	O	S	I	H	L	E	D	L	E	K	H	E
N	O	D	N	O	L	U	T	I	G	H	E	B	A	J
C	B	U	I	Z	X	W	G	U	C	U	S	R	V	P
O	R	M	A	L	J	I	G	O	O	C	I	X	E	M
B	E	D	B	M	A	D	R	E	T	S	M	A	N	A

Find the listed words in the diagram. They run in all directions - forward, backward, up, down and diagonally.

Amsterdam	Delhi	Jersey	South Wales
Bedford	England	London	York
Brunswick	Guinea	Mexico	Zealand
Caledonia	Haven	Rochelle	

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GO FIGURE! by Linda Thistle

The idea of Go Figure is to arrive at the figures given at the bottom and right-hand columns of the diagram by following the arithmetic signs in the order they are given (that is, from left to right and top to bottom). Use only the numbers below the diagram to complete its blank squares and use each of the nine numbers only once.

DIFFICULTY: ★★

★ Moderate ★★ Difficult
★★★ GO FIGURE!

	−		x		18
x		+		x	
	+		÷		3
+		÷		−	
	x		+		22
31		5		22	

1 2 4 5 6 6 7 8 9

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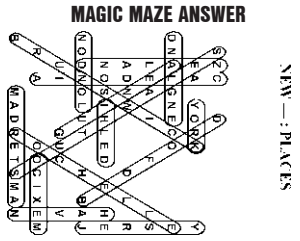
MAGIC MAZE ANSWER



GO FIGURE ANSWER

4	−	1	x	6	18
x	+	9	÷	5	3
6	+	2	x	7	22
+	÷				
31	−	5	+	22	

Ongoing ear infection frustrates dog owner

DEAR PAW'S CORNER: My little dog "Sandy," a 3-year-old Shih Tzu, has had an ongoing ear infection for the past four months. The vet said it was a yeast infection and gave me some drops for it. It cleared quickly, but within two weeks it was back again. This time the vet suggested I change his dog food, along with giving him the drops again, so now he is on a grain-free dog food. It cleared up for a while, but it is back again. Any suggestions on what to do now?—Donna, via e-mail

DEAR DONNA: Keep trying! Continue working with your vet to find a solution to Sandy's recurring ear infections. It may take a combination of treatments to stop them from happening, including a change in diet (such as the prescribed grain-free diet), drops or oral medication.

Signs of an ear infection in a dog typically include head shaking, yellow or brown "gunk" in the ears, a yeast-like smell, redness and swelling. Causes include debris or water in the ears, allergies, or unexplained factors.

Shih Tzus are prone to ear infections because of the shape of their ears, and because of the long hair growing over the ears—fluids don't drain from their ears as easily. Owners must clear the hair from their dogs' ears frequently and must be sure to dry their dogs' ears after swimming or bathing.

Dogs like Sandy who have repeat infections may benefit from having the hair clipped away from around their ears (let the veterinarian do this). Sandy may be given a long-term course of treatment, too—usually oral medication. In severe cases, vets may recommend surgery to reconstruct the ear canal to improve drainage, but this should be considered only when other avenues have been exhausted.

■ ■ ■

Send your tips, questions and comments to Paw's Corner, c/o King Features Weekly Service, P.O. Box 536475, Orlando, FL 32853-6475, or e-mail them to pawscorner@hotmail.com.

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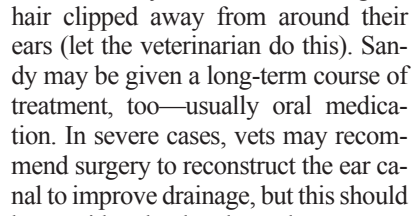
Bake everyday Irish soda bread



Spin a globe with your kids and let your fingers land on the Emerald Isle. Then get both hands in the dough to make "Everyday Irish Soda Bread." The recipe comes from my Irish-born-and-raised friend Margaret Sinnott Wachhol.

"Plain soda bread is as likely to be eaten as an accompaniment to a main meal (to soak up the gravy) as it is to appear at breakfast and afternoon tea," Margaret recalls. "Since the leavening agent is baking soda rather than yeast, you don't need to wait for the dough to rise—ideal for children's short attention spans."

For one loaf, you'll need these ingredients:

3 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
1/2 cup whole-wheat flour
1/2 cup unprocessed wheat bran
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 2/3 cups buttermilk

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

1. In a large bowl, whisk or stir together the flours, bran, salt, baking soda and baking powder until well-combined. Make a well in the center and pour in the buttermilk all at once. Stir with a fork until buttermilk is absorbed and the mixture begins to hold together. It should resemble a rough biscuit dough. Add additional buttermilk if too dry.

2. Using your hands, form the dough into a round, dome-shaped loaf about 8 inches in diameter. Lift the loaf from the bowl, and transfer to the prepared baking sheet.

3. Dust the top of the loaf with flour.

4. With a sharp knife, an adult should incise a cross, about 3/4 inch deep, into the top of the loaf. Transfer immediately to the oven.

5. Bake 1 hour and 10 minutes (rotating pan halfway through baking time) or until bread is deep golden brown and a skewer inserted in the center comes out clean. Remove from oven. Transfer to wire rack to cool.

Best if eaten within two days.

Extra Resource: Get inspired to prepare delicious Irish soups, stews and meat pies to enjoy with your homemade bread with "The Irish Pub Cookbook," by Margaret M. Johnson (Chronicle Books: www.chroniclebooks.com).

■ ■ ■

Donna Erickson's award-winning television series "Donna's Day" airs on public television nationwide. Visit www.donnasday.com to find out when it airs on your local PBS station and to sign up for Donna's e-newsletter.

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Life & Style

Critics' final answer: 'Slumdog' wins 5 awards

SANTA MONICA, Calif. (AP)—The critics have spoken, and "Slumdog Millionaire" is their final answer.

The rags-to-riches tale won a leading five prizes, including best picture, at Thursday night's Critics' Choice Awards. "Slumdog" also won honors for director Danny Boyle, writer Simon Beaufoy, star Dev Patel and composer A.R. Rahman.

"It's amazing to see how generous you've been to our film," said Boyle, who called the movie "a love song" to Mumbai.

"You're mad really," he continued backstage. "You're a bit like the Indians are mad about movies. When you find a movie you love, you go for it really."

"The Dark Knight" also won a pair of trophies: best action movie and best supporting actor for Heath Ledger. The crowd rose to its feet as the film's director, Christopher Nolan, accepted the award for Ledger.

"I can't presume to speak for him. His voice was as unique as it was original," said Nolan, adding that working with the actor "was one of the greatest experiences any of us ever had or will have."

"His contributions to cinema should be greatly appreciated," Nolan said, "so thanks for this appreciation."

AP

From left to right, Freida Pinto, Simon Beaufoy, Christian Colson, A.R. Rahman, and Danny Boyle backstage with the best picture award for "Slumdog Millionaire" at the 14th Annual Critics' Choice Awards on Thursday Jan. 8, 2009 in Santa Monica, Calif.

Ledger died of an accidental drug overdose in January 2007.

Sean Penn was another double winner, earning best actor honors and sharing the acting-ensemble prize for "Milk."

A humble Penn said the real Harvey Milk would have been his first choice for the starring role.

"He had the charisma that an actor can only aspire to," Penn said.

Co-star Josh Brolin called Penn's turn as the groundbreaking gay politician "the most incredible performance ever."

Milk came into the contest with eight nominations. "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button" also had eight nods, but didn't win a single award.

Kate Winslet was named best supporting actress for "The Reader," while Anne Hathaway and Meryl Streep tied for best actress for "Rachel Getting Married" and "Doubt" respectively.

"Meryl is my idol," Hathaway said backstage. "To win with my idol who I was nominated against is amazing. I'm so thrilled for her and I'm very thrilled for myself, too."

Winslet and Streep weren't on hand to accept their awards, nor was Bruce Springsteen, who won best song for "The Wrestler," from the movie of the same name.

Director Darren Aronofsky accepted on the Boss' behalf.

"I don't know how you put words into the coolest man's mouth," he said, "so I'll just say thank you."

"WALL-E" was the best animated feature and "Tropic Thunder" was best comedy.

"There's a lot of awards out there, and this one, I think, has the most meaning," said writer, director and star Ben Stiller. "I'm not just saying that because this is the only award our movie was nominated for."

Richard Gere received a standing ovation as he accepted the Joel Siegel award, which recognizes an entertainer's humanitarian efforts. The 59-year-old actor is a longtime supporter of Tibet.

"Clearly I'm undeserving of this," Gere said, urging the audience to "channel all that energy to Tibet."

The 14th annual Critics' Choice Awards, presented by the Broadcast Film Critics Association at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium, honored cinematic excellence in 17 categories. The group, which represents more than 200 TV, radio and online critics from the United States and Canada, founded the Critics' Choice Awards in 1995.

WINNERS LIST

Winners at Thursday's 14th annual Critics' Choice Awards:

- **Picture**: "Slumdog Millionaire"
- **Actor**: Sean Penn, "Milk"
- **Actress**: Tie: Anne Hathaway, "Rachel Getting Married," and Meryl Streep, "Doubt"
- **Supporting actor**: Heath Ledger, "The Dark Knight"
- **Supporting actress**: Kate Winslet, "The Reader"
- **Acting ensemble**: "Milk"
- **Director**: Danny Boyle, "Slumdog Millionaire"
- **Writer**: Simon Beaufoy, "Slumdog Millionaire"
- **Animated feature**: "WALL-E"
- **Young actor/actress**: Dev Patel, "Slumdog Millionaire"
- **Action movie**: "The Dark Knight"
- **Comedy movie**: "Tropic Thunder"
- **Picture made for television**: "John Adams"
- **Foreign language film**: "Waltz With Bashir"
- **Documentary feature**: "Man On Wire"
- **Song**: "The Wrestler," Bruce Springsteen, "The Wrestler"
- **Composer**: A.R. Rahman, "Slumdog Millionaire"
- **Joel Siegel award**: Richard Gere

New 'Idol' judge waiting for a call from Daughtry

LOS ANGELES (AP)—New "American Idol" judge Kara DioGuardi has a full schedule but there's someone she'd take a phone call from—Chris Daughtry.

"If he's out there and he wants to do a (song) co-write, please call me," DioGuardi told a teleconference Thursday.

DioGuardi

DioGuardi is a songwriter-producer who's worked with other "American Idol" contestants and is on the judging panel for the Fox TV show's eighth season, which starts Tuesday. But she's yet to collaborate with best-selling rocker Daughtry, who tops her "Idol" wish list.

Daughtry was a fourth-place finisher on the show and has turned out Grammy-nominated hits with the band that bears his name.

DioGuardi said she loved working with inaugural "American Idol" winner Kelly Clarkson, calling her a "feisty" performer who puts her personality into a song and can tackle any material successfully.

Although she's worked extensively with "Idol" contestants, DioGuardi said she never imagined she would be asked to join TV's No. 1 show, and compared it to hitting the lottery. But it jibes with what she's done as a writer-producer helping to guide young singers, she said.

DioGuardi's also worked with many of music's biggest stars, including Celine Dion, Marc Anthony and Gwen Stefani.

During auditions for the new season, DioGuardi said she was especially impressed by five or so of the male singers.

She heard a "lot of soul influence" among the contestants, a style that DioGuardi said wasn't necessarily R&B but "the way Maroon 5 is soulful."

After filming the audition episodes that kick off the season, DioGuardi was able to report that she and longtime judges Simon Cowell, Paula Abdul and Randy Jackson get along just fine. "It's very pleasant; there was never any weirdness. They were very accepting of me," DioGuardi said.

Travoltas hold private memorial for son in Florida

OCALA, Fla. (AP)—Friends and relatives of John Travolta and his wife Kelly Preston gathered Thursday at their central Florida home for a memorial service to honor the couple's 16-year-old son, Jett.

The couple lives in a sprawling $8 million home in a luxury subdivision with its own airstrip near this small town. Jett died at the family vacation home in Grand Bahama last week.

More than a dozen reporters and photographers gathered outside the Jumbolair Aviation Estates subdivision hours before the afternoon event.

A steady stream of catering trucks and florists entered the complex Thursday. A handful of locals also stopped by out of curiosity or carried bouquets of flowers and handed them to guards at the subdivision's main gate.

"I wanted to help John celebrate his son's life and not necessarily his death," said 52-year-old Sherie Maud of Ocala, who brought a dozen red roses.

A sign outside the Saddle Rock cafe in town, where Travolta often stops for a western omelet, read: "Condolences to John and Kelly."

The service for Jett was to adhere to the tenets of the actor's faith, Scientology, and celebrate the teen's life.

Tommy Davis, spokesman for the Church of Scientology International in Los Angeles, said Scientologist funerals or memorial services are more like a "celebration of their life, an acknowledgment of their life, and it's a way to wish them well in their future life.

Davis said Scientologists believe that a person is an immortal spiritual being, and one's spirit is reborn in another human body.

"The word reincarnation is a term often used loosely," Davis said. "We call it 'past lives' in the sense that one is living lifetime after lifetime."

It was unclear whether any celebrity friends were attending the service. Travolta, an avid pilot, bought the house because of the community airstrip and visitors can fly in and out without being seen by paparazzi, who have staked out the area for days.

The Travoltas have spoken publicly only once since their son died. "We are heartbroken that our time with him was so brief. We will cherish the time we had with him for the rest of our lives," Travolta and Preston said in a statement Sunday.

Jett Travolta had a history of seizures and was found unconscious Friday in a bathroom.

Doctors in the Bahamas performed an autopsy Monday but did not release results. A Bahamas undertaker said the teen's death certificate listed "seizure" as the cause of death. The body was cremated Monday and flown to the U.S. the same night.

Earlier Thursday, Travolta's friend and fellow Scientologist Tom Cruise told ABC's "The View that Jett's death was "horrific."

"John just adored him, both of his children," Cruise said haltingly. "... It's something that I don't have the words for."

Nolan nabs directing nomination for 'Dark Knight'

LOS ANGELES (AP)—"The Dark Knight" has landed a Directors Guild of America nomination for filmmaker Christopher Nolan.

The guild's best-director nominees Thursday also included Danny Boyle for the rags-to-riches tale "Slumdog Millionaire," David Fincher for the romantic fantasy "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button," Ron Howard for the Richard Nixon saga "Frost/Nixon" and Gus Van Sant for the Harvey Milk film biography "Milk."

Nolan

The nomination gives a potential Oscar lift for "The Dark Knight." Comic-book action tales generally compete only in technical categories during Hollywood's awards season, but the wildly successful Batman sequel has been gaining momentum for key prizes at the Oscars.

A day earlier, Nolan earned a screenplay nomination from the Writers Guild of America for co-writing "The Dark Knight."

The film received just a single nomination for Sunday's Golden Globes, a supporting-actor slot for the late Heath Ledger, who dazzled audiences with his diabolical turn as the villainous Joker.

Ledger is a likely contender for the same prize at the Oscars, whose nominations come out Jan. 22, the one-year anniversary of the actor's death from an accidental overdose of prescription drugs.

Nolan's nominations from the directing and writing guilds solidify the film's prospects in those Oscar categories, too. As one of the year's best-reviewed films, "The Dark Knight" also could end up a rare action flick that makes the best-picture cut.

Obama, Spider-Man appear in comic

WASHINGTON (AP)—Spider-Man has a new sidekick: The president-elect.

Barack Obama collected Spider-Man comics as a child, so Marvel Comics wanted to give him a "shout-out back" by featuring him in a bonus story, said Joe Quesada, Marvel's editor-in-chief.

"How great is that? The commander in chief to be is actually a nerd in chief," Quesada said. "It was really, really cool to see that we had a geek in the White House. We're all thrilled with that."

The comic starts with Spider-Man's alter-ego Peter Parker taking photographs at the inauguration, before spotting two identical Obamas.

Parker decides "the future president's gonna need Spider-Man," and springs into action, using basketball to determine the real Obama and punching out the impostor.

Obama thanks him with a fist-bump.

Marvel comics have featured most presidents, but generally in walk-on roles, Quesada said.

"I think President Nixon might have appeared on the cover, but not in a good way," he said.

Obama has said that as a child, he collected Spider-Man and Conan the Barbarian comic books. His Senate Web site used to have a photo of him posing in front of a Superman statue.

The Obama story is a bonus in Marvel Comic's Amazing Spider-Man #583, available in comic book shops nationwide on Jan. 14 for $3.99 and is expected to sell out, with half the covers devoted to Obama.

AP

This undated handout image provided Marvel Comics shows the cover of The Amazing Spider-Man featuring President-elect Barack Obama.

Cruise calls death of Travolta's son 'horrific'

NEW YORK (AP)—"Horrific" is how Tom Cruise described the sudden death of the son of his friend, John Travolta. Cruise struggled to maintain his composure as he spoke on "The View" about last week's death of 16-year-old Jett Travolta. "John just adored him, both of his children," Cruise said haltingly. "... It's something that I don't have the words for."

The 46-year-old actor called Travolta and his wife, Kelly Preston, "doting parents, just wonderful people." The couple have an 8-year-old daughter, Ella Bleu.

Jett died at the family vacation home in Grand Bahama. He had a history of seizures and was found unconscious in a bathroom. Results of an autopsy performed Monday were not released, but a Bahamas undertaker said the teen's death certificate listed "seizure" as the cause of death.

In response to a question from "The View" host Barbara Walters, Cruise defended Scientology, which he and the Travoltas follow, against rumors that have swirled since Jett Travolta died.

The church doesn't discourage conventional medical care, Cruise declared—"actually, the exact opposite."

"They say, 'Get your physical, get your medication, get your physical illnesses handled.'"

Taped Thursday, Cruise's appearance on the ABC daytime talk show is scheduled to air Friday. His latest film is "Valkyrie."

AP

In this image released by ABC, actor Tom Cruise, third left, poses with the hosts of the ABC daytime show "The View," from left, Whoopi Goldberg, Barbara Walters, Joy Behar, Sherri Shepherd and Elisabeth Hasselbeck during a taping, Thursday, Jan. 8, 2009, at ABC Studios in New York.

ENTERTAINMENT BRIEFS

Happy 74th birthday, Elvis!

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP)—Fans gathered for a cake-cutting on Elvis Presley's 74th birthday and got word of two new residents at Graceland. Presley's ex-wife, Priscilla Presley, led several hundred fans in singing "Happy Birthday" on Graceland's front lawn Thursday and announced that two rescue horses—named Max and Bandit—have taken up residence on the grounds of the famous white-columned house. Elvis, who died at Graceland in 1977 at age 42, maintained stables and riding pastures for horses at his longtime Memphis residence. With the addition of Max and Bandit, Graceland now has four horses residing in its eight-stall barn. Following the sing-along and the reading of an proclamations, fans lined up for pieces of birthday cake handed out at Graceland's sprawling souvenir shopping center.

Gavin Creel set to play Claude in B'way's 'Hair'

NEW YORK (AP)—One actor in, another out of the upcoming Broadway revival of "Hair," scheduled to open March 31. Gavin Creel will play the pivotal role of Claude in this production of the quintessential 1960s "tribal love-rock musical." The show begins preview performances March 6 at the Al Hirschfeld Theatre. Creel, a Tony nominee for "Thoroughly Modern Millie," recently played Bert in the London stage production of "Mary Poppins." Eden Espinosa who was to have portrayed Sheila in the revival has bowed out of the musical because of personal reasons. No replacement yet. Other casting will be announced shortly.

Phish announce summer tour dates

NEW YORK (AP)—The Phish reunion is in full swing: The band just announced plans for a summer tour. Phish disbanded five years ago with a grand goodbye concert in their home state of Vermont, but announced last fall that they were getting back together for a trio of concerts starting March 6. On Thursday, the jamband said they would kick off a summer tour on New York's Long Island on June 4. Phish—a quartet of Trey Anastasio, Page McConnell, Mike Gordon and Jon Fishman—got its start in 1983. Their improvisational style and mix of different genres made them an enormously successful touring group with a cultlike following. They decided to call it quits in 2004 after fatigue and personal problems took a toll.

Flapping gums in dentist's office annoy silent patient

By ABIGAIL VAN BUREN
UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

DearAbby

DEAR ABBY: How does one convey a message to one's dentist and his assistants that you would prefer they not discuss personal matters with each other while working on me?

I recognize that they may be so well-trained that they can converse and do these procedures at the same time. But talking over the patient gives the impression that they aren't fully concentrating on the business at hand.

Sitting in the dentist's chair with your mouth propped wide open, it's impossible to say a word. How can this be conveyed in a respectful way?

DENTALLY DISTRESSED IN MILWAUKEE

DEAR DISTRESSED: One way to get your message across would be to wait until the procedure is finished, then tell your dentist that you feel being treated like a nonentity is rude and insensitive, and you would prefer it not happen when you're in the chair. If you don't have the courage to say it directly, then tell it to his office manager.

An alternative would be to take your business to another dentist because this one needs to practice better chair-side manners. If that's not acceptable, consider bringing an iPod and listening to it to drown out their voices.

■ ■ ■

DEAR ABBY: I am a 14-year-old girl. Over the past couple of years, I have grown very close to my 28-year-old cousin, "Amanda." She lives halfway across the country, but we have kept in touch by e-mail and had fun hanging out together last summer.

I recently heard from relatives that Amanda is planning to get married in a few months. She has not known the man very long, and he has not yet been formally introduced to our family. Amanda doesn't have much money, so they've decided on a small ceremony with only their parents attending.

I'm disappointed that I won't be able to go. I'm also afraid that Amanda and I won't be as close as we have been, since being married is a huge commitment and her priorities may shift.

I have tried talking to her about this, but she hasn't answered my e-mails. I miss the closeness we had, and I feel guilty that I'm not as excited as I should be about this big event in Amanda's life. What should I do?

SAD COUSIN IN CALIFORNIA

DEAR SAD: Your special relationship with your cousin is not over, but it has been moved to the back burner because right now she's distracted by her whirlwind romance and planning for her wedding. Once she comes back down to earth, I'm sure you will hear from her.

Send her a token gift and a sweet card wishing her happiness. Try to forgive her for not answering your e-mails and accept the fact that she may be distracted for a while. And rather than allowing yourself time to brood, fill your time with activities and friends you enjoy. These things have a way of working themselves out in time. Trust me.

■ ■ ■

DEAR ABBY: If you divorce your husband and then start dating him again, what's the appropriate way to introduce him to associates? I say "friend"; he says "wife."

Oh, by the way, I kept my married name, so we still have the same last name.

TIFFANY IN COLORADO

DEAR TIFFANY: Smile and say, "I'd like you to meet 'John.'" If the person asks his last name, volunteer it, and when the eyebrows go up, tell the truth -- that he's your ex-husband, not your brother.

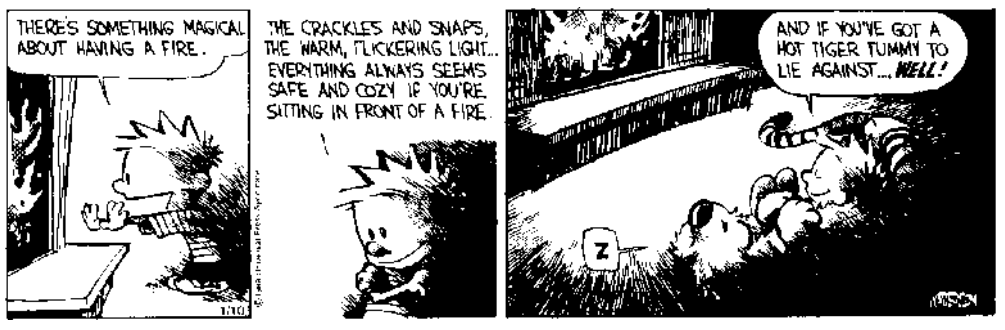
Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Write Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069

To order "How to Write Letters for All Occasions," send a business-sized, self-addressed envelope, plus check or money order for $6 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby -- Letter Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Postage is included in the price.)

Pastimes

Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson

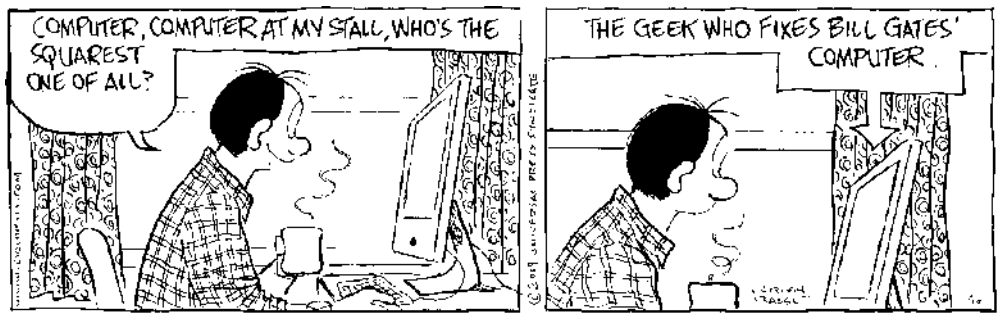

THERE'S SOMETHING MAGICAL ABOUT HAVING A FIRE.
THE CRACKLES AND SNAPS, THE WARM, FLICKERING LIGHT... EVERYTHING ALWAYS SEEMS SAFE AND COZY IF YOU'RE SITTING IN FRONT OF A FIRE.
AND IF YOU'VE GOT A HOT TIGER TUMMY TO LIE AGAINST.... WELL!
Z

Garfield®

By Jim Davis

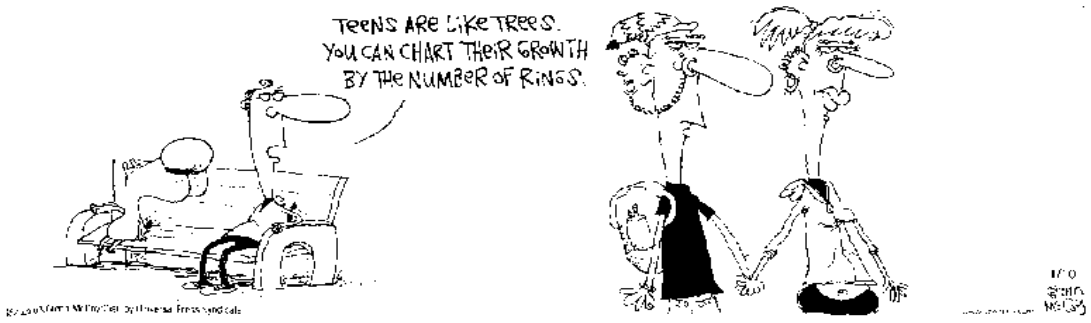
Adam@home

By Bryan Basset



The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy



CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
1 Hefty portion
6 Houdini's specialty
12 "Ball Four" author Jim
13 Moon-landing mission
14 Enticement
15 Walking-stick material
16 Paraphernalia
17 Sea flock
19 Navy rank (Abbr.)
20 Scruff
22 Ruin the veneer
24 Prosperous periods
27 Cowboy's crony
29 Arizona city
32 On-the-town time for many
35 Remark re Yorick
36 Trig function
37 Olive —
38 Roulette bet
40 Lumberyard equipment
42 Matlock's field
44 Couple, in a gossip column
46 Busy with
50 Pass
52 Not alfresco
54 Second largest of the seven
55 On an angle
56 Local clergyman
57 Fencing weaponry

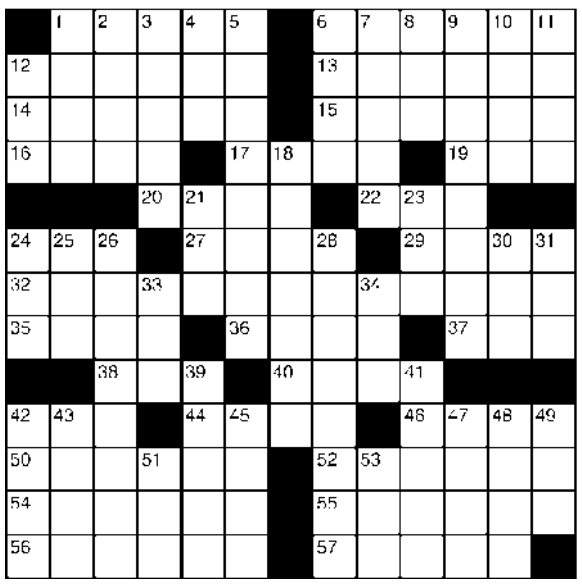
DOWN
1 "Unforgettable" singer

Solution time: 27 mins.

F	W	F	■	S	A	F	F	■	B	R	O	W
■	O	P	■	I	B	E	X	■	P	J	D	E
K	N	E	E	D	E	E	P	■	A	M	E	N
S	T	F	O	N	A	■	I	A	W	■	■	■
■	■	■	G	E	M	■	A	S	L	E	E	P
A	L	L	O	Y	■	B	I	P	■	B	R	C
H	O	O	T	■	C	O	N	■	C	C	G	S
A	S	O	■	W	A	X	■	C	A	N	O	E
B	O	P	E	E	P	■	M	A	R	■	■	■
■	■	■	P	E	A	■	F	R	O	S	F	S
C	L	E	S	■	B	E	E	P	B	E	E	P
A	R	R	O	■	L	A	T	E	■	A	L	E
P	O	F	M	■	F	R	S	T	■	N	Y	C

Yesterday's answer 1-10

2 Shake in the grass?
3 One-eighty
4 Neither correlative
5 Skateboarder's protection
6 Deserve
7 Twitch
8 Collapsible bed
9 Batman, to Bruce Wayne
10 Blueprint
11 A really long time
12 Suitcase
18 Poker ploy
21 Springtime mo.
23 "— Blue?"
24 Dream Team's chant
25 One of the gang
26 Lucas masterwork
28 Nitro concoction
30 Bashful
31 Pac. counterpart
33 Employ
34 Fresh
39 Bee Gees' genre
41 Move laterally slowly
42 Bound
43 — Romeo
45 Rend
47 Staff member?
48 Alert people are on theirs
49 California fort
51 Pendulum's place
53 Pinch



STUMPED? For answers to today's crossword, call **1-900-226-5955!** 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: Janet Jones, 48; Pat Benatar, 56; George Foreman, 60; Rod Stewart, 64

Happy Birthday: Make your heartfelt emotions work for you, not against you this year. You don't have to impress the world, only the few who make a difference to your life and your future. This is a year of sharing, caring and making small but important gains. Your numbers are 7, 10, 16, 20, 23, 37, 42

ARIES (*March 21-April 19*): Avoid anyone who has a tendency to upset you. It's important that you stay clear of mind in order to deal with the decisions that must be made. You will come up with a workable solution that will outshine anyone you have to deal with. ✪✪

TAURUS (*April 20-May 20*): Travel plans should be in the works to get away from the stress you live with everyday. Love will escalate if you pay attention to the important things in life. A personal change will lead to a happy existence. ✪✪✪✪

GEMINI (*May 21-June 20*): You may be asked to contribute to something you don't believe in and, if you don't say no, you will pay the price. Be straight about the way you feel. It's better to be upfront and honest right from the beginning. ✪✪✪

CANCER (*June 21-July 22*): Speak from the heart. The more you focus on what's really important in life, the better you will feel about yourself and the direction you are headed. Set a standard that will shape the years ahead in a positive way. ✪✪✪

LEO (*July 23-Aug. 22*): Someone from your past may confuse you. Think back to the experiences you had with this person and don't fall into the same trap. Be open and honest and avoid a touchy situation that may lead to problems at work. ✪✪✪

VIRGO (*Aug. 23-Sept. 22*): Your involvement in something you believe in will lead to bigger and better things. You only have to show your worth and integrity and, before you know it, you'll be heading up the team and getting things done. ✪✪✪✪

LIBRA (*Sept. 23-Oct. 22*): Just do what you promised. The longer you procrastinate, the more demanding the whole ordeal will become. Allow yourself time to develop a creative skill or hobby and don't be deterred from doing the things you really want to do. ✪✪

SCORPIO (*Oct. 23-Nov. 21*): You can turn your place into the comfort zone you need to ease your stress and tension. Making a little spot for working on a hobby or developing a project will help center you mentally, emotionally and spiritually. ✪✪

SAGITTARIUS (*Nov. 22-Dec. 21*): Question what others have to offer before offering too much of what you've built on your own. Avoid business relationships that are not equal. A problem with someone you respect may add to your responsibilities. ✪✪✪

CAPRICORN (*Dec. 22-Jan. 19*): You have to address issues that are slowing you down or causing you too much anxiety to do your work efficiently. Emotional matters will escalate if you aren't open about the way you feel. Listen to that small voice within and do what's best for yourself. ✪✪✪

EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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AQUARIUS (*Jan. 20-Feb. 18*): Develop a skill or hobby to a level that can make it prosperous. You have to challenge yourself in order to realize your capabilities. You have so much ahead of you, so don't waste time. ✪✪✪

PISCES (*Feb. 19-March 20*): Socialize and take part in community events or activities that will help you grow emotionally, spiritually and mentally. Love is on the rise and a connection made with someone will lead to playful interaction. ✪✪✪✪✪

Birthday Baby: You are thoughtful, engaging, adventurous and passionate about life and love. You are strong and outspoken and go after what you want with enthusiasm.

Eugenia's Web sites: ***astroadvice.com*** *for fun,* ***eugenialast.com*** *for confidential consultations*

SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku *By Dave Green*

			2		1			
	7						9	
		1		4		3		
7				8				1
		8	1	5	6	7		
2				3				8
		6		7		5		
	4						3	
			9		3			

Difficulty Level ★★★★ 1/10

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

Yesterday's SUDOKU Answer

5	7	9	1	2	4	8	3	6
2	8	4	5	6	3	9	7	1
6	3	1	7	8	9	5	4	2
1	5	6	8	9	7	3	2	4
8	2	3	6	4	1	7	5	9
4	9	7	2	3	5	1	6	8
7	1	8	4	5	2	6	9	3
9	6	2	3	7	8	4	1	5
3	4	5	9	1	6	2	8	7

Difficulty Level ★★★★

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WONDERWORD®

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally, even backward. Find them and **CIRCLE THEIR LETTERS ONLY. DO NOT CIRCLE THE WORD.** The leftover letters spell the Wonderword.

BONE DENSITY TEST Solution: 5 letters

Y	S	A	E	Q	P	I	C	T	U	R	E	F	A	S
N	D	T	U	L	A	R	E	N	I	M	N	A	C	S
E	O	I	L	F	I	N	G	E	R	I	S	K	S	E
C	C	S	T	U	G	R	A	M	S	N	I	H	S	N
K	T	E	R	O	S	S	I	G	N	S	N	C	N	D
F	O	V	A	K	P	F	A	F	G	U	I	P	O	I
R	R	A	S	R	N	S	R	S	M	T	A	X	I	L
A	Y	W	O	C	B	E	S	B	S	I	P	R	T	O
G	R	R	U	I	O	E	E	I	N	G	A	A	A	S
I	O	I	N	N	N	R	T	L	L	H	C	Y	M	G
L	T	S	D	K	S	A	E	R	E	T	K	S	R	E
I	S	T	C	H	T	S	S	K	E	L	E	T	O	N
T	I	I	A	S	S	S	P	I	H	V	D	G	F	D
Y	H	P	A	R	G	O	M	O	I	S	P	I	N	E
T	F	V	I	T	A	T	I	T	N	A	U	Q	I	R

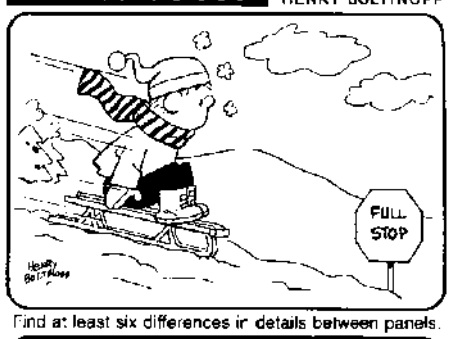
(c) 2009 Universal Press Syndicate www.wonderword.com 1/10/09

Doctor, Easy, Finger, Fragility, Cancer, Grams, Heel, Hips, History, Information, Knee, Mineral, Neck, Numbers, Packed, Painless, Picture, Quantitative, Quick, Results, Risks, Safe, Scan, Score, Segment, Shape, Shin, Signs, Skeleton, Soliciness, Spine, Spot, Statistics, Thickness, Tight, Tomography, Ultrasound, Vertebrae, Waves, Wrist, X-rays

Yesterday's Answer: Photography

HOCUS-FOCUS

BY HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.

Differences: 1. Sign is different. 2. Trees have been added. 3. Boy's hat is different. 4. Boy is running. 5. Scarf is different. 6. Boy's coat has buttons.

Wishing Well®

2	7	4	6	3	5	8	7	6	2	5	7	3
I	M	J	J	G	B	L	A	O	N	E	K	L
6	5	6	5	7	5	6	8	2	3	6	4	6
B	S	A	Y	E	M	D	I	I	O	V	O	A
2	7	5	4	2	5	4	8	3	2	5	2	7
T	W	P	Y	I	A	F	F	R	A	T	T	I
4	2	6	3	7	6	8	5	6	2	5	3	5
R	I	N	I	S	C	E	H	E	V	E	O	T
7	6	3	6	8	4	7	5	2	6	3	7	2
E	M	U	E	I	O	C	I	E	N	S	H	T
3	6	4	7	2	7	5	8	2	7	3	4	2
D	T	M	O	A	I	C	S	K	C	A	H	E
3	8	7	4	2	7	4	8	4	8	4	8	8
Y	S	E	U	N	S	M	U	O	N	R	N	Y

HERE IS A PLEASANT LITTLE GAME that will give you a message every day. It's a numerical puzzle designed to spell out your fortune. Count the letters in your first name. If the number of letters is 6 or more, subtract 4. If the number is less than 6, add 3. The result is your key number. Start at the upper left-hand corner and check one of your key numbers, left to right. Then read the message the letters under the checked figures give you.

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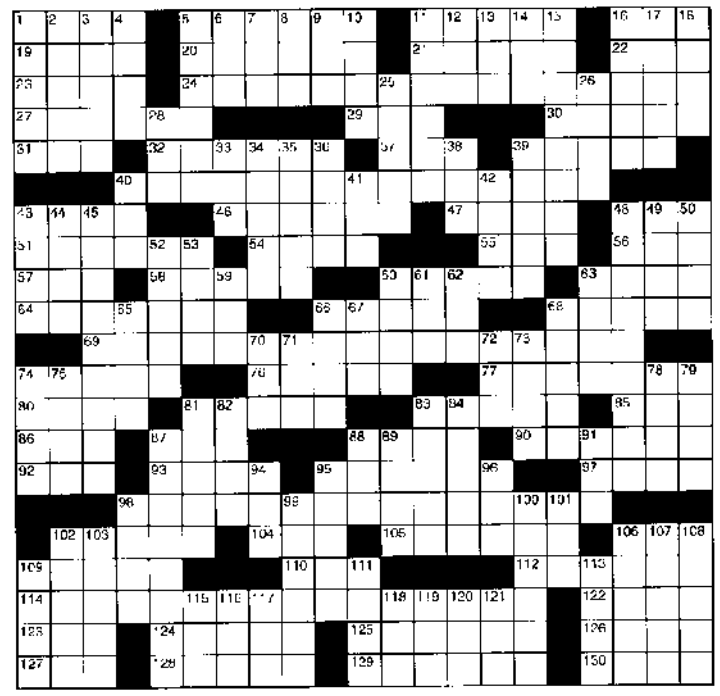
Super Crossword — FOREIGN FILMS

ACROSS
1 Voucher
5 Piano place
11 Big bargain
16 "Major Barbara" monogram
19 Clair or Coty
20 Swimmer Gertrude
21 Garrulous
22 School subject
23 "Bus Stop" playwright
24 Peter O'Toole film
27 Medal material
29 Pine product
30 Incongruous state
31 Command to Fido
32 Eventually
37 Where the buoys are
39 Gaze
40 Judy Davis film
43 Jury member
46 Mr. Miyagi's forte
47 Emcee's site
48 Spigot
51 Kindred
54 Aussie rockers
55 Plant disease
56 What a teller needs
57 In-your-face item
58 Dancer Jose
60 Pamphlet
63 Floor covering
64 "Hoarder" taxing time?
66 "I Love a Parade" composer
69 Gregory Peck film
74 Jeweler's weight
76 Exodus figure
77 "— Butterfly" ('66 hit)
80 Ken of "Hill Street Blues"
81 Conductor's concern
83 Endangered herbivore
85 Solidify
86 In error
87 Twisted
88 Way over yonder
90 Little laugh
92 Kyser or Starr
93 Rushes
95 Giza god
97 Ha son d'—
98 Bob Hope film
102 On — (doing great)
104 Down meas.
105 Clone
106 A Bobbsey twin
109 Intense
110 — Claire, WI
112 "Blueberry Hill" singer
114 Jane Fonda film
122 Leave out
123 Fireworks reaction
124 Gives the green light
125 Pageant props
126 Misplace
127 Neighbor of Ger.
128 Actress Davis
129 Least conventional
130 — -in-the-wool

DOWN
1 Corn holders
2 Matisse or Rousseau
3 Gold bricks?
4 "— Wolf" ('85 film)
5 Montana's capital
6 Periodontists' org.
7 Contemporary
8 "Don't touch my bone!"
9 Ginger —
10 Dollars for quarters
11 Audiophile's equipment
12 Eastern "Way"
13 Wee one
14 "America's Most Wanted" abbr.
15 Ira Gershwin, for one
16 Loreville's land
17 Escort
18 Command to Fido
25 Immobile class
26 "La Rondine" rendition
28 Energy
33 "For shame!"
34 Albeniz or Asimov
35 Peripatetic Polo
36 "Gracious me!"
38 Pitch in
39 Numskull
40 Chassis' nickname
41 Coldhall abbr.
42 DEA officer
43 Theatrical Joseph
44 Literary pseudonym
45 Thrill
48 Motorcycle feature
49 Wagon part
50 Hammer head
52 Maran sight
53 Olive —
59 Monty's milieu
60 '82 Jeff Bridges film
61 Volcano part
62 Clerical garb
63 Baseball's Speaker
65 Genghis
66 Curly colf
67 Supportive ol'
68 Blue hue
70 Tasty tuber
71 Weaken
72 Agt.
73 Got off
74 Cuisine creator
75 — Romeo
78 Swerve
79 Gen. Robt. —
81 Experiment
82 Checked out
83 "Scent of a Woman" dance
84 Chilean pianist
87 Without reservation
88 Bonaparte's buddy
89 Ward (off)
91 Shop width
94 Farm feature
95 Examine
96 PD alert
98 Col.'s brass
99 Forsyte's "The — File"
100 Firstborn
101 Rock's — Speedwagon
102 Blessed source?
103 Mercedes of "The Fisher King"
106 Skelton co-star
107 Absinthe ingredient
108 Famous
109 Perched on
111 Proverb preposition
113 Shape
115 Turner or Pappas
116 Rob Roy's refusal
117 Writer Rand
118 "— no!"
119 Math abbr.
120 Vein contents
121 Bell and Barker



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Trivia test

by Bill Rodriguez

1. TELEVISION: In "Murphy Brown," what was the name of the TV show that included the title character, played by Candice Bergen?
2. GAMES: What color is the cue ball in the game of pool?
3. GENERAL KNOWLEDGE: What is the source of the drug digitalis?
4. THEATER: The Tony Awards were named after which director/actress?
5. LANGUAGE: What is the British term for "baloney" or nonsense?
6. COMPUTERS: What does the acronym FORTRAN stand for?
7. OLYMPICS: In what event would the "Fosbury flop" be used?
8. ANATOMY: What is the result of the condition called dysphasia?
9. GEOGRAPHY: The term "pyroclastic flow" would follow what kind of natural geographical occurrence?
10. FOOD & DRINK: What would a serving dish called a tureen be used for?

Answers

1. "FYI"
2. White
3. The foxglove flower
4. Antoinette Perry
5. Codswallop
6. Computer programming language that stands for FORmula TRANSlation
7. High jump
8. Impairment of speech and verbal comprehension
9. Volcanic eruption
10. Soup or stew

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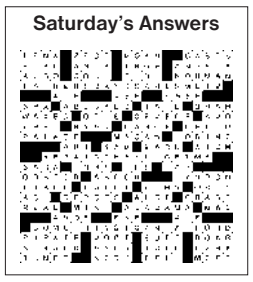
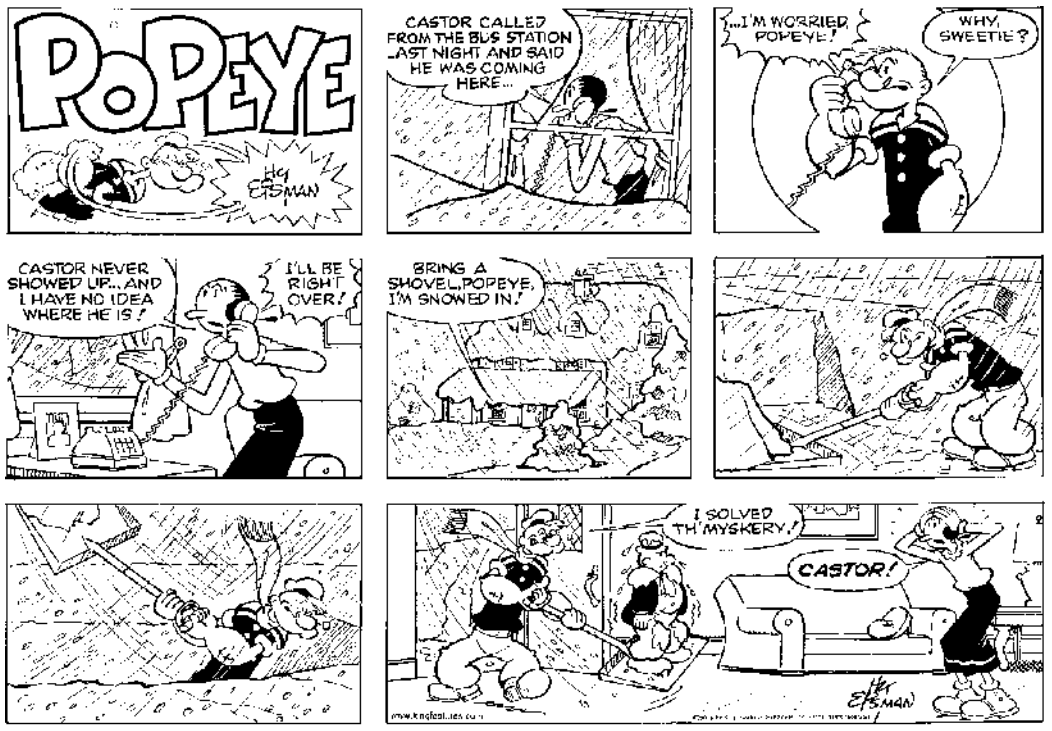
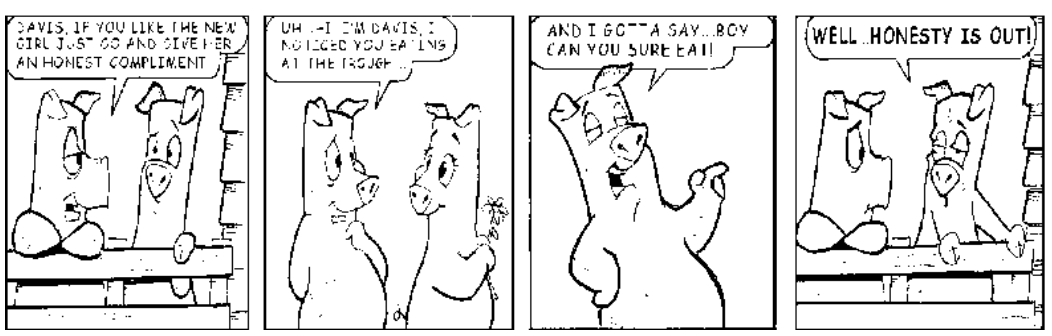
Saturday's Answers




POPEYE
Hey EISMAN
CASTOR CALLED FROM THE BUS STATION LAST NIGHT AND SAID HE WAS COMING HERE...
...I'M WORRIED POPEYE!
WHY, SWEETIE?
CASTOR NEVER SHOWED UP...AND I HAVE NO IDEA WHERE HE IS!
I'LL BE RIGHT OVER!
BRING A SHOVEL, POPEYE, I'M SNOWED IN!
I SOLVED TH' MYSKERY!
CASTOR!

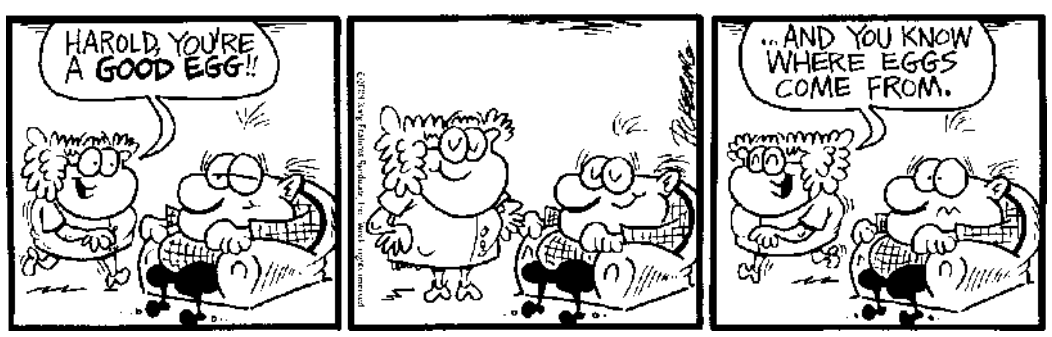
Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps

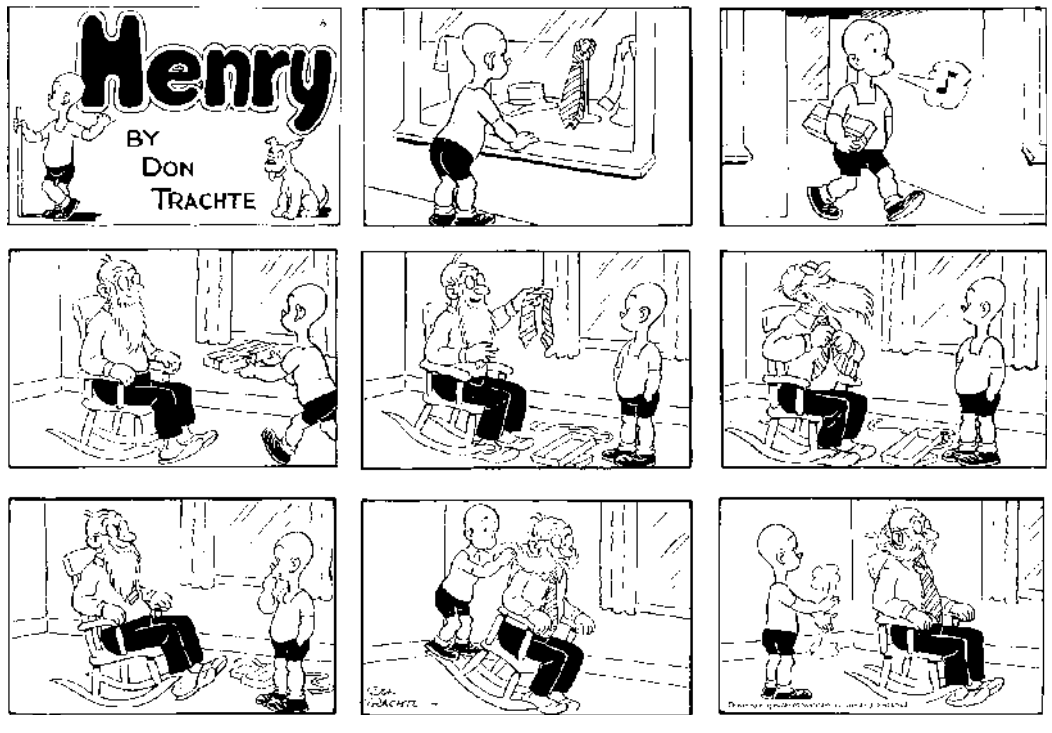

DAVIS, IF YOU LIKE THE NEW GIRL JUST GO AND GIVE HER AN HONEST COMPLIMENT
UH...I-I'M DAVIS, I NOTICED YOU EATING AT THE TROUGH...
AND I GOTTA SAY...BOY CAN YOU SURE EAT!
WELL...HONESTY IS OUT!

The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



MARK TRAIL
POLAR BEARS HAVE A 4-INCH-THICK LAYER OF BLUBBER TO KEEP THEM WARM ON THE ICE AS WELL AS IN THE WATER
THE SHAGGY WHITE GIANTS MAY NEVER SEE DRY LAND...SOME SPEND THEIR ENTIRE LIVES MOVING FROM ONE ICE FLOE TO ANOTHER
A POLAR BEAR HAS A SENSE OF SMELL 100 TIMES BETTER THAN OURS, AND OFTEN IT WILL SPEND HOURS WAITING FOR A SEAL TO POKE ITS HEAD THROUGH A BREATHING HOLE SO IT CAN GRAB IT
GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE IS MELTING THE BEARS' HUNTING GROUNDS, AND SCIENTISTS PREDICT SOME POPULATIONS MAY ONE DAY DISAPPEAR
HUNDREDS OF INDUSTRIAL COMPOUNDS ARE CARRIED TO THE ARCTIC BY WIND AND OCEAN CURRENTS, AND RECENTLY FLAME RETARDANTS HAVE BEEN FOUND IN THE BEARS' TISSUES
POLAR BEARS ARE AT THE TOP OF THE FOOD CHAIN, MAKING THEM AMONG THE MOST CONTAMINATED LIVING ANIMALS ON EARTH
JACK LAIRD



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• 3-Liner	**$25**
• 5-Liner	**$35**
• 3-Liner with picture	**$45**
• 5-Liner with picture	**$55**

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Classified Ads

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Saturday Issue:
- *Saipan Tribune:* All ads placed Friday before 12 noon will come out Saturday issue and anything placed thereafter will be published on Monday issue.

CANCELLATION

Classified Ads

Cancellations should be made before 12 noon of the day prior to date of publication.

REFUNDS

Refunds will only be made if cancellation deadlines are met. No refunds will be made once ad is already printed.

CHECK YOUR ADS

Saipan Tribune will not be responsible for errors after the first day of publication. Errors should be called in before noon of the issue date. *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to place ads under proper headings and to revise copy when necessary.

ADVERTISING POLICY

All advertising in the *Saipan Tribune* are subject to applicable rate sheet, copies of which are available from the Advertising Sales Department (please call 235-8747, 235-2769 or 235-6397). All ads will be subject to approval prior to publication. We reserve the right to edit, refuse, reject or cancel any ad at any time. Also, *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to place ads under proper headings and to revise copy when necessary.

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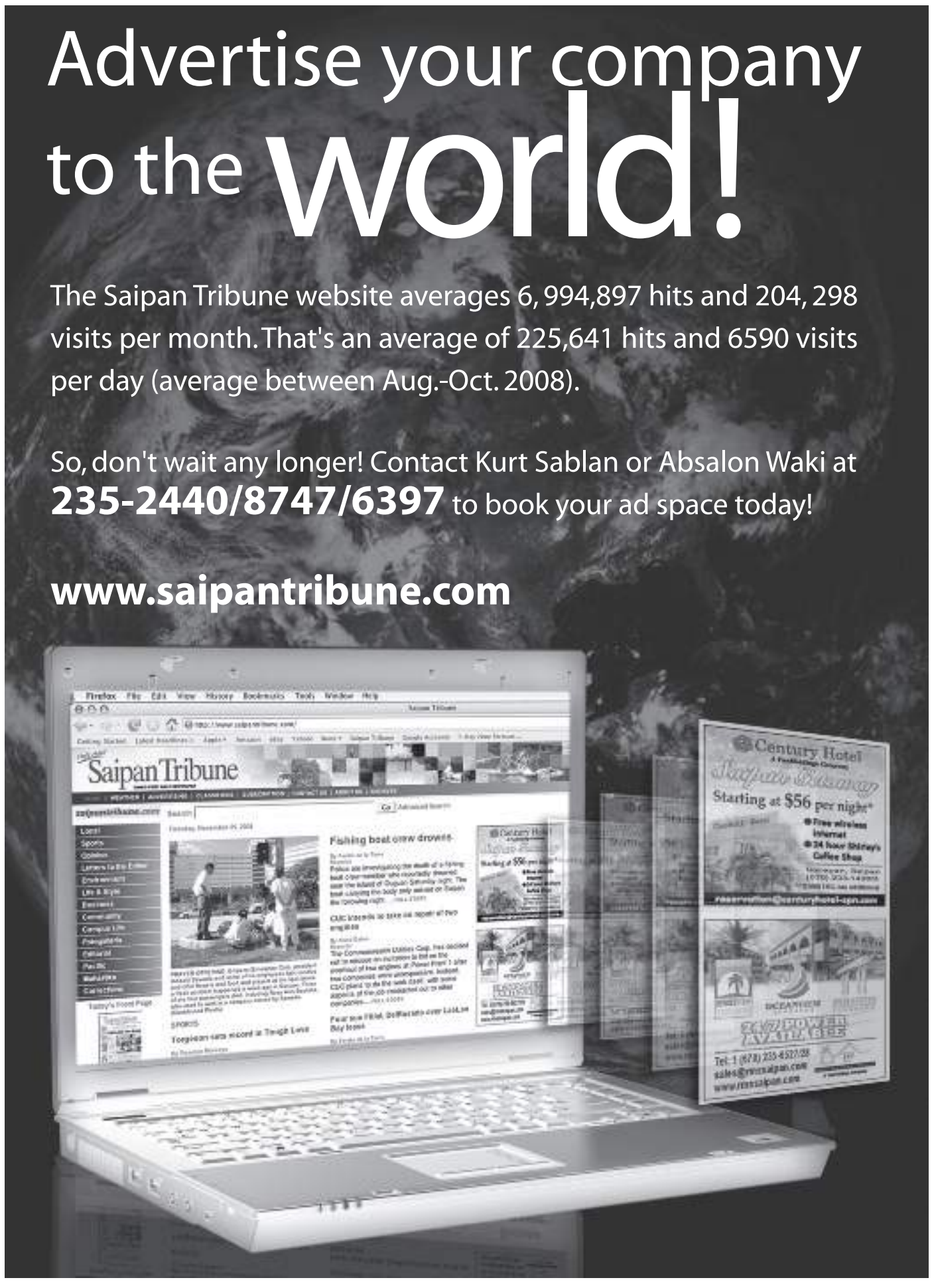
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Smoltz to Red Sox; Baldelli, Penny will join him

BOSTON (AP)—John Smoltz and Brad Penny are on their way to the Red Sox. Rocco Baldelli was already in Boston, holding up his new jersey.

After missing out on Mark Teixeira, the biggest free-agent prize of the offseason, the Red Sox were poised to make a series of smaller deals that would essentially complete their roster. They announced Baldelli's signing on Thursday night at the annual dinner of the Boston Baseball Writers Association, with more news expected soon.

"I think you'll see us now turn to players who we can take chances on, players who represent potential impact players," Red Sox general manager Theo Epstein said. "We still have some things going on."

Epstein would not confirm the deals for Smoltz or Penny, but as he spoke Penny was on his way out of Boston after completing his physical. The two-time All-Star, a native Oklahoman, was off to watch the Sooners play in the Bowl Championship Series title game against Florida.

Smoltz, who spent his first 21 years with the Atlanta Braves, reached a preliminary agreement with the Red Sox on a $5.5 million, one-year contract, according to a person familiar with the negotiations who spoke on condition of anonymity because the deal had not been announced. The person said Smoltz will have the chance to earn another $5 million in performance bonuses based largely on how much time he spends on the active roster.

For example, the pitcher would get $125,000 if he's on the opening-day roster and $500,000 if he's on the roster on the final day of the regular season.

The deal is contingent on Smoltz passing a physical, which was scheduled for Monday.

"I was going to withhold comment until the announcement of my signing with a new team," Smoltz said in a statement issued through his agent, "but I now feel the need to clear up any misconceptions and inaccuracies about the contract negotiations between myself and the Atlanta Braves. There were large discrepancies between the offer from the Braves and offers from other teams."

The Red Sox are also negotiating with Mark Kotsay to return as a backup first baseman and outfielder. They are also pursuing a catcher, while holding out the possibility that Jason Varitek could return or be replaced by a platoon that played at Triple-A last year.

The Red Sox agreed to pay Baldelli $500,000 for 2009, taking a chance on a player who spent most of last season on the disabled list for the AL champion Rays. The 27-year-old batted .263 with four home runs and 13 RBIs in 28 games after being diagnosed with a mitochondrial disorder that causes chronic muscle fatigue.

Further tests, however, and a recent visit to the Cleveland Clinic led to what Baldelli called a "refined" diagnosis of channelopathy, a protein irregularity considered more treatable and less severe.

"The results were positive," he said. "It was something I was definitely excited about for my personal health and for my career.

"I think once I get to spring training and get to my feet again, I'll know a lot more," said Baldelli, who received the Tony Conigliaro Award on Thursday for overcoming adversity with courage and determination. "I anticipate being able to do more than I did last year."

A Rhode Island native who homered against Boston in the Rays' Game 3 victory during the AL championship series and had a go-ahead single in the seventh game, Baldelli can earn $7 million in bonuses.

"I didn't like him so much when that ball went over the Green Monster," Red Sox manager Terry Francona said. "If there are some risks, it seemed like it was kind of worth it from our side because he is so accountable as a player and as a person."

Penny is 94-75 in nine years for the Florida Marlins and Los Angeles Dodgers, going 16-4 with a 3.03 ERA in '07 and finishing third in voting for the NL Cy Young Award. But he was 5-9 with a 5.88 ERA in 15 starts last year for the Dodgers before going on the disabled list with shoulder tendinitis and bursitis.

His deal could be announced as early as Friday.

But Smoltz could be the biggest splash for a team that lost out in pursuit of Teixeira. The rival Yankees spent $423.5 million on contracts for Teixeira, CC Sabathia and A.J. Burnett after missing the playoffs last season.

"They spent a lot of money," said Francona, who joked near the end of the season that the Yankees would spend $1 billion in the offseason. "I was like half right. They spent a lot of money and they got a lot of good players and it doesn't make our job easier. But we've gone toe-to-toe with them really well.

"Our division is a monster. We beat up on each other and we will continue to do that. And our job didn't get easier but that doesn't mean we can't win."

The only pitcher in baseball history with 200 wins and 150 saves, Smoltz is coming off major shoulder surgery that sidelined him for most of last season, but feels healthy enough to pitch at least one more year.

Smoltz, 41, who prefers to finish his career as a starter, would join a rotation that already includes Daisuke Matsuzaka (18-3), Jon Lester (16-6), Josh Beckett (12-10) and Penny. The Red Sox also have Tim Wakefield and Clay Buchholz for the rotation if Smoltz or Penny aren't ready at the start of the season.

A minor leaguer when he was acquired from Detroit in 1987 for Doyle Alexander, Smoltz was the cornerstone of Braves teams that won a record 14 straight division titles from 1991-2005, including a World Series championship in '95.

"I have always loved the city of Atlanta, and it will always be my home," Smoltz said in his statement. "I will cherish my 21 years with (manager) Bobby Cox and all my Braves' teammates. I continue to wish the Atlanta Braves nothing but success in the future."

Braves general manager Frank Wren declined comment when reached by e-mail.

Smoltz won 24 games and the NL Cy Young Award in 1996, but elbow problems led him to shift to the bullpen to relieve the stress on his arm. He set an NL record with 55 saves in his first full season as a closer in 2002.

After three years finishing games, Smoltz went 47-26 in his second run as a starter. But shoulder pain cut short his 2008 season after only six appearances.

AP

This Sept. 7, 2007 file photo shows Atlanta Braves pitcher John Smoltz throwing against the Washington Nationals during the first inning of a baseball game at Turner Field in Atlanta.

Saves leader Hoffman agrees to deal with Brewers

MILWAUKEE (AP)—Crank up the AC/DC, Milwaukee: The Brewers have landed career saves leader Trevor Hoffman, solving a shaky closer situation that could have gone into spring training with no clear-cut favorite.

Hoffman's agent, Rick Thurman, credited Milwaukee for being "diligent and aggressive" in its pursuit of Hoffman after Brewers players called to recruit him.

"A number of friends who will now be teammates called and let him know that Milwaukee was a great place to play and live in," Thurman said in an e-mail to The Associated Press. "At the end of the day, that made a big difference. It made a huge difference the last 16 years in San Diego. That's why he always stayed there instead of opting to go elsewhere for more money. He now looks forward to a new beginning and a new era in Milwaukee."

Hoffman agreed to a one-year contract worth $6 million on Thursday, a deal that hadn't yet been announced. He can make an additional $1.5 million in performance bonuses, based on games finished.

The 41-year-old right-hander had pitched for the Padres since 1993, becoming the face of the franchise after Tony Gwynn retired. Hoffman converted 30 of 34 chances last season, increasing his saves record to 554.

Hoffman became a free agent but still hoped to hear the gongs of his trademark warmup song—AC/DC's "Hells Bells"—in San Diego for the rest of his career. Contract talks with the Padres soured, however, and the team pulled its offer of $4 million for 2009 with a club option for $4 million in 2010.

Hoffman could have stayed relatively close to home, as the NL West champion Los Angeles Dodgers showed considerable interest. But he instead picked the Brewers, giving the team a solid solution to one of its biggest question marks heading into 2009.

Now, Hoffman will be reunited with former San Diego teammate Mike Cameron, who played for the Padres in 2006 and 2007.

Milwaukee managed to get by with reliever Salomon Torres after Eric Gagne faltered in the closer role last season. Torres emerged to lead the team with 28 saves, and Milwaukee went on to win the NL wild card - its first playoff appearance since 1982.

Milwaukee was eliminated in the first round of the playoffs by Philadelphia.

Torres then retired and Gagne, who recovered to perform fairly well in a setup role in the final weeks of the season, filed for free agency.

The departures made bolstering the bullpen a major need for new manager Ken Macha and the Brewers this winter. Milwaukee recently signed reliever Jorge Julio and appeared ready to take a look at pitchers already on the roster to fill the closer's role, but kept looking for help.

The move also should boost the morale of Brewers fans after the team made an effort to re-sign ace starter CC Sabathia—only to be outbid by the New York Yankees.

Hoffman was 3-6 with a 3.77 ERA in 48 games last season. Relying on a wicked changeup, he has saved at least 30 games in 13 seasons—another major league record. But San Diego finished last in the NL West last season, 21 games behind the Dodgers.

Parker scores 19 to lead Spurs past Clippers

SAN ANTONIO (AP)—Tony Parker scored 19 points and San Antonio beat the skidding Los Angeles Clippers 106-84 on Thursday night, giving the Spurs their ninth win in the past 10 games despite getting only eight points from Tim Duncan.

The Clippers have lost nine straight.

The Spurs (24-11), winners of three consecutive games, have a 1 1/2-game lead over second-place New Orleans in the Southwest Division.

Roger Mason added 18 points for the Spurs. Michael Finley had 15 and Manu Ginobili 13 off the bench. Matt Bonner scored 11.

Though Duncan fell short of double figures in points and rebounds (four), he led the Spurs with nine assists.

The Clippers (8-27) got 21 points each from Eric Gordon and Al Thornton. Mardy Collins added 16.

San Antonio led by as many as 24 in the fourth quarter.

The Spurs broke open a close game by scoring the first 10 points of the second half. The surge was led by 3-pointers from Bonner and Finley, and it erased Los Angeles' one-point halftime lead and made it a 53-44 advantage for the Spurs after three minutes of the third quarter.

Finley went 4-of-6, including 3-of-3 from 3-point territory, for 11 points in the quarter. Bonner was 4-of-4 for nine points as the Spurs led by as many as 12 in the third quarter.

The Clippers trailed 75-69 after the third despite shooting 53 percent from the floor.

The Spurs have won the first two meetings between the teams this season.

The Clippers expanded an early two-point lead to six when the Spurs missed their final eight shots of the first quarter. San Antonio went 6-of-23 from the floor (26 percent) in the first quarter while Los Angeles shot 50 percent.

Most of San Antonio's shooting woes were from long range. The Spurs, No. 1 in 3-point shooting in the NBA, were 2-of-9 from the 3-point line in the first quarter and 5-of-17 at halftime.

They finished the game 11-of-29.

Los Angeles led 22-16 heading into the second quarter when Collins found the basket from 14 feet. Collins scored eight first-quarter points after making 4-of-6.

The Clippers went up by nine on Brian Skinner's follow of Gordon's miss four minutes into the second quarter. It was their largest lead of the game.

But the Spurs cut the lead to 42-41 on a 15-footer by Parker with 1:25 left in the second quarter before the Clippers ended the first half with a 44-43 lead. Parker had 13 points in the first half, but so did Thornton. He led the Clippers with 6-of-8 shooting to go along with Collins' 5-of-7 showing from the floor.

AP

San Antonio Spurs guard Tony Parker, front, of France, drives past Los Angeles Clippers guard Mardy Collins, behind, during the second quarter of their NBA basketball game in San Antonio, Thursday, Jan. 8, 2009.

Mavericks 99, Knicks 94

At Dallas, Josh Howard scored 19 points, Jason Kidd added 16 and the Dallas Mavericks overcame a subpar game from Dirk Nowitzki to beat the New York Knicks.

The Mavericks have beaten the Knicks nine straight times in Dallas. New York hasn't won on the Mavericks' home court since a 100-93 victory on Dec. 16, 1999, back when Dallas played a couple of miles down the road in Reunion Arena.

Nowitzki, the NBA's fourth-leading scorer, was 3-of-13 from the floor and scored 10 points, just two more than his season low.

Knicks center Eddy Curry, who missed the first 33 games with a knee injury, saw his first action of the season. He entered with 2:42 left in the first quarter and scored on a layup just more than a minute later.

That's was Curry's only shot attempt in 2 1/2 minutes of action. He also grabbed two rebounds.

Antoine Wright had 13 points, Brandon Bass added 12 and Jason Terry 10 for the Mavericks.

Chris Duhon hit his first nine shots and scored 24 points, and Wilson Chandler added 20 for the Knicks, who have lost two in a row since beating defending champion Boston on Sunday.

New York's David Lee had 13 points and 15 rebounds—his seventh consecutive double-double. Duhon finished 10-of-14 from the field.

Ogilvy opens PGA season with 67 and the lead

KAPALUA, Hawaii (AP)—Geoff Ogilvy felt his game was still sharp after winning in Australia last month. It must have been for him to play bogey-free Thursday and beat his best score at Kapalua by five shots.

Ogilvy opened the PGA Tour season by saving par on the last hole—the only time he got in trouble all day—for a 6-under 67 that gave him a one-shot lead in the Mercedes-Benz Championship, a score that only surprised him because of the location.

"I haven't shot very many good rounds around this course, so maybe that's a surprising thing," said Ogilvy, who had not broken 72 in his previous two trips to the winners-only tournament. "But the fact that I'm playing OK is not surprising."

Ogilvy won the Australian PGA Championship and tied for sixth in the Australian Open, and he was just as crisp with his game in taking the first-round lead over Ernie Els, Kenny Perry and fast-closing Johnson Wagner.

With only moderate wind on a Plantation course that Ogilvy refers to as "extreme golf," eight players broke 70 and 20 players in the 33-man field broke par.

FedEx Cup champion Vijay Singh, who will have knee surgery next week, was not among them. He made double bogey on the opening hole and rallied for a 73. Defending champion Daniel Chopra was headed for a round in the 80s until birdies on the two holes for a 79.

That Ogilvy was atop the leaderboard was surprising only because his average score in eight previous rounds was 73.875. But he kept practicing during his brief respite at home in Arizona, and it showed.

"We only finished Australian Open three week ago," Ogilvy said. "And three weeks isn't enough to get rusty."

Els arrived in Maui having played only once in the last six weeks, and that worked well for him. In his first time to Kapalua in four years, he made only one blunder—a tee shot into the hazard on the par-5 15th—to get his season off to a solid start.

Wagner, one of a dozen newcomers to the winners-only Mercedes with his victory in the Shell Houston Open, wasn't even in the picture until a birdie-birdie-eagle finish. Perry joined the group at 68 with a birdie on the last hole.

Davis Love III, who won the final event of 2008 at Disney, and Ryuji Imada were in the group at 69. Imada ran off seven straight birdies starting at No. 6—one short of the PGA Tour record—but followed that streak with consecutive bogeys.

As for all the hype over the youngsters?

Anthony Kim wore an Oklahoma hat on the first hole while playing with Florida alum Camilo Villegas before taking it off, and it took awhile for his game to arrive. Kim had a 71, while Villegas had to rally for a 74.

It was an idyllic start, as often is the case at Kapalua, with manageable wind, occasional light showers, sunshine, rainbows and plenty of optimism about the new season.

"I want to have a good season, like everybody," Els said.

The Big Easy was off to a phenomenal start with an eagle on the par-5 fifth hole and a 31 on the front nine. He was 6 under through 11 holes, but played the rest of the way at 1 over—despite playing two par 5s—and had to settle for a 68.

"I would have taken it before I teed off," Els said. "But I'm a little hot under the collar right now."

He hooked his tee shot into the hazard on the 15th, had to take a penalty drop and hit out sideways, and he did well to make bogey. Els had a 4-iron into the green on the par-5 18th, but left it out to the right to avoid trouble on the left, and missed a 10-foot birdie.

Ogilvy also finished with a par, but was all smiles.

He was rarely in trouble, and the only time he had to get up-and-down was on the par 5s. But with a 3-iron to the 18th green, he pulled it into the hazard, and after a lengthy discussion where to drop, he was faced with a 50-yard pitch, which he hit to 4 feet for par.

Hall of Fame quarterback John Elway hit the ceremonial tee shot to begin the season, a 350-yard drive that speaks to the elevation, wind and the grain in the grass that makes the Plantation course unlike any other they will play all year.

Wagner is among a dozen newcomers to Kapalua, but he arrived last Friday and quickly became acquainted.

"I've played Saturday and Sunday, every day I've been here, and fell in love with the golf course," Wagner said. "It's early, but I feel really comfortable out here."

He didn't look terribly comfortable on the greens, which can takes years of experience to figure out the slope and grain. But it all came together at the end, with a 10-foot birdie down the slope on the 16th, a 25-foot birdie across the grain on the 17th and his 18-foot eagle on the final hole.

"It was a great finish, and turned a 71 into 68 real quick," Johnson said.

Browns introduce Eric Mangini as coach

BEREA, Ohio (AP)—Eric Mangini is starting over where he started out.

Mangini, who began his NFL career as a ballboy for the Browns, was introduced as Cleveland's 12th full-time coach on Thursday, less than two weeks after he was fired by the New York Jets.

The 37-year-old Mangini signed a four-year deal with the Browns, who are rebuilding once again following a 4-12 season that ended with the firings of coach Romeo Crennel and general manager Phil Savage.

Browns owner Randy Lerner hasn't decided on a GM yet, but the frontrunner is George Kokinis, Baltimore's director of player personnel and a longtime friend of Mangini's.

Mangini began shagging balls with the Browns in 1994 under then-coach Bill Belichick, who liked the kid's work ethic and quickly promoted him to a public relations assistant before adding him to the scouting department. Now Mangini's taking over the job from Crennel, one of his best friends in the game who may be on his staff in Cleveland.

"It is really special to be back here, where I got my first opportunity," said Mangini, who opened his news conference by joking that he should be getting coffee or food for the media. "I have a very distinct vision of what I want to build. Having talented players with character, players selflessly driving toward the same goal. I'm going to be vigilant about that."

When he arrived in New York, Mangini inherited a 4-12 team and led them to 10 wins in his first season, prompting the tabloids to dub him "Mangenius." By the end of his run in the NFL's largest market, he was being called moody, dour and controlling—like Belichick.

Mangini went 23-25 with one playoff loss in three seasons with the Jets, who started 8-3 this season but lost four of their last five games and missed the playoffs.

He took the fall after the Jets finished a disastrous stretch where they lost to Denver, San Francisco and Seattle—three non-playoff teams—in the final month behind 39-year-old quarterback Brett Favre's injured arm and questionable play calling by the coach.

Mangini acknowledged mistakes were made with the Jets, but said he enjoyed his time there.

"You learn so much from your experiences," he said. "I tell players, win or lose, be honest. I ask myself that all the time. Nobody stops improving. I learned so many things over three years. There's no Dummies guide to head coaching."

Mangini didn't point any fingers and said he had no problem with the Jets' acquistion of Favre, a trade that pushed starter Chad Pennington out the door.

"I really enjoyed my time with Brett," he said. "He's a Hall of Fame quarterback and came into a challenging situation. I respected how important it was for him to be one of the guys and fit into the team. I liked him as a person."

TRIBUNE SPORTS SCORES

NBA STANDINGS

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	29	8	.784	_
New Jersey	18	18	.500	10 1/2
Philadelphia	15	20	.429	13
Toronto	15	21	.417	13 1/2
New York	13	21	.382	14 1/2

Southeast Division

Orlando	28	8	.778	_
Atlanta	22	12	.647	5
Miami	18	16	.529	9
Charlotte	13	23	.361	15
Washington	7	27	.206	20

Central Division

Cleveland	28	6	.824	_
Detroit	21	12	.636	6
Milwaukee	17	20	.459	12
Chicago	15	20	.429	13 1/2
Indiana	13	22	.371	15 1/2

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Southwest Division

San Antonio	24	11	.686	_
New Orleans	21	11	.656	1 1/2
Dallas	22	13	.629	2
Houston	22	15	.595	3
Memphis	11	25	.306	13 1/2

Northwest Division

Denver	25	12	.676	_
Portland	21	14	.600	3
Utah	21	15	.583	3 1/2
Minnesota	10	25	.286	14
Oklahoma City	5	31	.139	19 1/2

Pacific Division

L.A. Lakers	28	6	.824	_
Phoenix	19	13	.594	8
Golden State	10	27	.270	19½
L.A. Clippers	8	27	.229	20 1/2
Sacramento	8	28	.222	21

Yesterday's Games
Dallas 99, New York 94
San Antonio 106, L.A. Clippers 84

MERCEDES-BENZ CHAMPIONSHIP SCORES

KAPALUA, Hawaii (AP)–Scores Thursday from the Mercedes-Benz Championship, a $5.6 million (4.1 million euros) U.S. PGA Tour event at the 7,411-yard, par-73 (36-37) Plantation Course at Kapalua Resort:

FIRST ROUND

Geoff Ogilvy	33-34	67
Johnson Wagner	35-33	68
Ernie Els	31-37	68
Kenny Perry	33-35	68
Davis Love III	32-37	69
Steve Lowery	36-33	69
Sean O'Hair	35-34	69
Ryuji Imada	34-35	69
Boo Weekley	35-35	70
D.J. Trahan	35-35	70
Zach Johnson	38-33	71
K.J. Choi	35-36	71
Anthony Kim	35-36	71
Will MacKenzie	36-36	72
Dustin Johnson	37-35	72
Greg Kraft	34-38	72
Richard S. Johnson	37-35	72
Brian Gay	36-36	72
Carl Pettersson	36-36	72
Trevor Immelman	38-34	72
Adam Scott	35-38	73
Vijay Singh	38-35	73
J.B. Holmes	35-39	74
Stewart Cink	38-36	74
Justin Leonard	38-36	74
Camilo Villegas	38-36	74
Chez Reavie	36-39	75
Cameron Beckman	39-37	76
Parker McLachlin	40-37	77
Ryan Palmer	35-43	78
Andres Romero	39-39	78
Marc Turnesa	39-40	79
Daniel Chopra	39-40	79

By The Associated Press

LOCAL SCORES

BUDWEISER SOFTBALL STANDINGS

Men's Division

DCCA	9	0
CPA	7	1
Freedom Air	7	1
Joeten Motors	7	2
Beach Boys	6	2
No Zone	6	2
Legislature	6	3
DLNR	5	4
Docomo	5	4
POI	4	3
DEQ/CRM	4	5
P & S	3	4
Law & Order	3	6
PSS	2	5
Customs	2	5
CHC	2	6
CUC	2	7
PIC	1	6
Mayors	1	8
Hopwood	0	8

Women's Division

NMC	7	0
DCCA	3	3
CUC	2	4
Finance	2	4
CHC	1	4

Freedom Air breezes past P&S

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
roselyn_monroyo@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Leftfielder Shane Yamada homered twice, while three of his teammates made one round-tripper apiece, as Freedom Air hammered Procurement and Supply, 25-15, in the men's division of the 2008 Inter Government/ Business Softball League Thursday at the Capital Hill Ballfield.

Yamada went 4-for-5 at the plate, scored three runs, and had four RBIs. He hit a three-run homer at the top of the first inning, which saw Freedom Air making 12 runs.

Yamada stepped up to the plate twice in the first inning connecting on a double in his second hit. He recorded his second round-tripper in the fourth inning nailing a solo homer.

Second baseman Ken Villagomez, third baseman Roy Celis, and first baseman Roque Camacho had one homer each and combined for 11 RBIs.

Five Freedom Air sluggers went 3-for-5 at-bat, and overall the team was 28-for-53 at the plate for a batting average of .528.

P&S scored six runs in the first inning to keep pace with Freedom Air, but the former failed to make a major comeback in the next six innings to absorb its fourth loss in six games.

Freedom Air improved to a 7-1 record to share the No. 2 spot with Commonwealth Ports Authority.

Jets 14, DLNR 8

In the first game of the night, the Joeten Motor Jets held the Department of Land and Natural Resources to two runs in the last three innings to nail a 14-8 win.

The Jets were ahead by only one, 7-6, after four complete innings, when a four-run top of the fifth highlighted by J.J. Laniyo's two-run single allowed them to widen the gap, 11-6.

DLNR answered only with a solo homer from Tony Mareham at the bottom of the fifth and although it shut out the Jets at the top of the sixth, the former scored one run, anew at the bottom allowing the latter to keep the lead, 11-8.

The Jets added three more runs at the top of the seventh and secured the win when DLNR's first two batters were beaten to first and the third flied out to centerfield.

The victory put the Jets in solo third place with their 7-2 record, while DLNR dropped to a 5-4 slate.

Legislature 15, Mayor's Office 11

Toi Celis went 4-for-4 at-bat to lead Legislature to a 15-11 victory over the Mayor's Office.

The win was the Lawmakers sixth in nine games, while the loss was the Mayor's Office eighth in nine matches.

Celis scored two runs, made one double, and three RBIs.

Legislature gained early control of the match scoring three runs in the first and five in the second. The Lawmakers added one more in the third before being shut out in the fourth.

Mayor's Office managed to make only three runs in the first four innings to fall behind by six, 3-9, and although it recorded six runs in the fifth inning, these were not enough to bring the team back to the game. Legislature foiled Mayor's Office bid for a comeback win after scoring six runs in the fifth and sixth inning. Mayor's Office had only two runs in the last two innings.

TEBOW

From Page 28

tential for the NFL draft—not exactly the performance he wanted.

"Obviously, they're a great defense. I think just a couple times we got ourselves in trouble," Bradford said.

These teams totaled an average of 99 points per game, but wound up with a scoreless first quarter. In the second quarter, Florida's defense made a pair of goal line stands that left it 7-all at halftime.

By then, college football fans around the country were certainly wondering whether these were indeed the two best teams. And it surely gave steam to the suggestion by President-elect Barack Obama and others that a playoff system is needed.

Cheered on by a flock of rooters who made the five-hour drive from The Swamp in Gainesville, the Gators became the second team in the 11-year history of the BCS to win two titles.

Nicknamed "Big Game Bob" for his early success, Stoops lost for the third time with a national championship on the line. This was the first time Florida and Oklahoma played—Stoops was the Gators' defensive coordinator when Steve Spurrier led them to the 1996 title.

Tebow struggled throughout the first half, his lone highlight a 20-yard touchdown pass to Louis Murphy for a 7-0 lead early in the second quarter. Bradford came right back with a swift 65-yard drive, capped by his 6-yard TD toss to Jermaine Gresham.

Florida's defense, rather than Tebow, Harvin and its speedsters on the other side of the ball, kept the Gators close.

Poised to break the tie midway through the second quarter, Oklahoma owned a first-and-goal at the 9. Chris Brown carried four straight times and the Gators stood up the 1,100-yard rusher, twice stuffing him from the 1.

Rarely turned back in the red zone this season, the Sooners let it happen to them again in the final minute before halftime.

There were 10 seconds left and Oklahoma was out of timeouts when Bradford dropped back from the 6. He tried to hit Manuel Johnson at the goal line, but the pass deflected off him and the Gators ran a perfect tip drill, with three defenders touching the ball before Major Wright had the interception.

Tebow, meanwhile, kept stopping the Gators.

The interceptions were bad picks, too—Tebow telegraphed a long, cross-field throw that Nic Harris easily grabbed and later made a short flip over the middle right to Gerald McCoy.

Were the Gators out of whack? Hard to tell, though offensive coordinator Dan Mullen certainly had a lot to think about. Hired recently by Mississippi State, he becomes the Bulldogs' full-time head coach Friday.

Both teams seemed to have trouble with the game officials. The crew kept interrupting play for various reasons, and the result was a sloppy, scoreless first quarter.

Stoops and Meyer took turns hollering at ACC referee Ron Cherry, as if to tell him "Let 'em play!"

Florida linebacker Brandon Spikes was equally vocal. A few days after calling Big 12 defenses "a joke," he got into a couple of early shouting and shoving skirmishes with the Sooners. It was even a bit edgy before the game—warming up in the end zone, an Oklahoma kicker rolled his eyes when two Gators leaned against the goal post right behind him.

Tebow, naturally, came out charged up.

He got off the team bus, walked over to a clutch of Florida fans, waved his arms and then ripped off his tie and threw it into a bunch of tailgaters—tail-Gators, in this case.

By the time Tebow trotted out for warmups, most of the Gators were already kneeling along the goal line to stretch. Tebow walked up and down the line, slapping hands and backsides of all 90-some players.

WHAT

From Page 28

Beaver trapped:

Oops, they did it again. Another key loss to an underdog Pacific 10 Conference school cost the USC Trojans a chance to play for the national title. Oregon State's 27-21 win over USC in Corvallis on Sept. 25 was certainly no fluke. Oregon State physically dominated USC in jumping out to a 21-0 halftime lead and freshman tailback Jacquizz Rodgers finished with 186 rushing yards, dodging and darting past the Trojans defense. The heartbreak came two years after a 2006 defeat at Corvallis cost USC a title-game trip, and one year after a shocking home loss to 41-point underdog Stanford denied the Trojans a BCS title bid.

The 'Lubbock Lob':

There is no debating the play of the year in college football. Texas Tech quarterback Graham Harrell's 28-yard touchdown pass to Michael Crabtree with one second left lifted the Red Raiders to a 39-33 upset victory over No. 1 Texas in Lubbock. The defeat cost Texas a trip to the national title game. It would have been a fabulous finish for Texas had freshman safety Blake Gideon, on the final drive, not dropped what could have been a game-clinching interception. Texas Tech's national title hopes were later wrecked with a lopsided loss at Oklahoma.

Tiebreaker from hell:

The BCS got blamed for Texas being left out of the championship game even though it beat Oklahoma, but that was actually a Big 12 problem. Conference rules dictated that the three-way tie in the Big 12 South involving Texas, Oklahoma and Texas Tech would be settled by the team ranking highest in the BCS standings. That team ended up being Oklahoma, even though it lost to Texas. The Sooners advanced to the Big 12 title game and earned a national title berth with a win over Missouri.

Sam's the man:

Oklahoma quarterback Sam Bradford put up silly numbers in the Sooners' no-huddle offense and was rewarded with the 74th Heisman Trophy. Bradford became the second sophomore to win the award, following Florida quarterback Tim Tebow last year. Bradford orchestrated one of the most prolific offenses in college football history. He came into the BCS title game having already thrown for 48 touchdowns, with only six interceptions, and was averaging 343 passing yards a game. Bradford is Oklahoma's fifth Heisman winner. He finished with 1,726 votes to beat out Texas quarterback Colt McCoy (1,640) and Tebow (1,575).

Big Ten blues:

Ohio State's loss to Texas in the Fiesta Bowl capped a dreadful 1-6 bowl season for the Big Ten. Penn State's loss to USC in the Rose Bowl was the Big Ten's sixth straight in the Granddaddy and had some wondering whether the Pac-10/Big Ten partnership that started in 1947 should be discontinued. The Big Ten has not won a Rose Bowl since Jan. 1, 2000, when Wisconsin defeated Stanford. The conference is now 15-28 in bowls since Ohio State won the national title in 2002, including a 3-8 record in BCS games.

Irish win bowl game!

Hey, it doesn't happen very often. After nine straight bowl defeats, the Irish sort of salvaged a mediocre, don't-let-it-happen-again season with a wipeout win in the Hawaii Bowl over Hawaii.

OK, it was only Hawaii, but the victory allowed Notre Dame to finish 7-6 and put a smiley-face finish on another chaotic and disappointing season in which fourth-year Coach Charlie Weis nearly lost his job. The pressure is really on next season—the "Win nine in '09" campaign is not just a slogan, it's a mandate.

Flail to the victors:

There will definitely not be an "Ann Arbor Day" to celebrate Rich Rodriguez's first year as Michigan coach. The winningest program in college football history finished with nine losses, the most in school history, and missed a bowl game for the first time in 34 years. Michigan's 3-9 campaign marked the school's first losing season in 41 years. The Wolverines also lost a fifth straight game to archrival Ohio State, but other than that things went well.

Give 'em the ax!

It's not only Stanford's annual rallying cry against archrival California, it's also what a lot of athletic directors did to their head coaches this year. Among the coaches who lost their jobs or "resigned" included Tyrone Willingham (Washington), Tommy Bowden (Clemson), Phil Fulmer (Tennessee), Greg Robinson (Syracuse), Chuck Long (San Diego State), Sylvester Croom (Mississippi State), and Tommy Tuberville, forced out at Auburn despite averaging 8.5 wins for 10 seasons.

Tough (but lucrative!) business.

"You're a missed field goal from being a bum with everybody else," Florida Coach Meyer said.

Parker scores 19 to lead Spurs past Clippers

Tony Parker scored 19 points and San Antonio beat the skidding Los Angeles Clippers 106-84 on Thursday night, giving the Spurs their ninth win in the past 10 games despite getting only eight points from Tim Duncan.

26

Saipan Tribune
Sports

Smoltz to Red Sox; Baldelli, Penny will join him

John Smoltz and Brad Penny are on their way to the Red Sox. Rocco Baldelli was already in Boston, holding up his new jersey.

25

MINI DYNASTY FOR FLORIDA

Tebow leads Gators past Oklahoma

By BEN WALKER
AP NATIONAL WRITER

Tim Tebow gave Florida the jolt it needed to become a national champion. But all his efforts in a sloppy, choppy BCS championship game likely did little to quiet fans of Utah, Southern California and Texas, all of whom already claimed the top spot.

"I'll tell you, we're going to enjoy a big win, we're going to enjoy the national championship," coach Urban Meyer said after the Gators beat No. 2 Oklahoma 24-14 on Thursday night. "Let someone else worry about that. Gators are No. 1."

The high-scoring shootout between Heisman Trophy winners Sam Bradford and Tebow never materialized.

Tebow, however, shook off a career-high two interceptions to rescue the top-ranked Gators (13-1). He drove them to the clinching score—he took two hard steps toward the line, jumped and zipped a 4-yard touchdown pass to David Nelson with 3:07 left to make it 24-14.

Percy Harvin returned from an ankle injury and dashed for 122 yards on only nine carries for the Gators. His 52-yard gallop set up Jonathan Phillips' 27-yard field goal early in the fourth quarter for a 17-14 lead.

Tebow added to the title he helped the Gators win in 2006 with a rout of Ohio State and, one season after winning the Heisman, brought home another trophy.

"Tebow, just call him Superman," Harvin said.

National chomps, indeed!

The Associated Press will release its final poll early Friday morning.

Tebow was picked the game's most outstanding player, running for 109 yards. His passing wasn't so precise—18-for-30—yet it was his sheer will that kept the Gators going.

"I was already motivated for a national championship game. But you know, there was some trash talking going on, and it just gets me going during the game," Tebow said.

It was Florida's third national title overall, and the third straight for a team from the Southeastern Conference, and it was the Sooners' fifth straight loss in a BCS game. Oklahoma (12-2) set a modern record for scoring with 702 points this season and put up at least 60 points in its last five games, yet never found its rhythm.

"In the end, I'll be glad to try again next year," Sooners coach Bob Stoops said. "If that's the biggest burden I have to bear in my life, I'm a pretty lucky guy."

Bradford, who beat out Tebow for the Heisman, was a disappointing 26-for-41 with two interceptions. Like Tebow, he's going to explore his po-

See TEBOW on Page 27

AP

Florida players celebrate with the trophy after winning the BCS Championship NCAA college football game against Oklahoma 24-14 in Miami, early Friday, Jan. 9, 2009.

AP

Florida quarterback Tim Tebow walks off the field after Florida beat Oklahoma 24-14 in the BCS Championship NCAA college football game Thursday, Jan. 8, 2009, in Miami.

AP

Florida coach Urban Meyer, center, is doused during the fourth quarter of the BCS Championship NCAA college football game in Miami, Thursday, Jan. 8, 2009.

What a season

By CHRIS DUFRESNE
(C) 2009, LOS ANGELES TIMES

The 2008 season started Labor Day weekend with UCLA's incredible overtime win against Tennessee in Rick Neuheisel's debut, prompting some in the Bruins' marketing department to believe USC's monopoly in Los Angeles might be over.

UCLA finished 4-8, the Tennessee coach who lost to UCLA was forced out, USC's monopoly of L.A. continued and college football was as mind-bogglingly controversial and poll-powered as ever .... just the way we like it.

Before we look ahead, let's recap the top 10 moments of 2008.

1 Florida wins it:

Urban Meyer had a big career decision after leading Utah to a 12-0 season in 2004. He could become coach at Notre Dame, which he had long called his dream job, or take over at Florida.

Meyer chose Florida and Thursday night won his second national title in four years as his Gators defeated Oklahoma in the Bowl Championship Series title game.

You could say Meyer made the right career choice. He has already claimed one more national title than longtime coach Steve Spurrier, who led the Gators to the championship in 1996.

The Southeastern Conference has now won three straight BCS national titles, four since 2003, and can make a strong claim that it remains the nation's preeminent college football conference.

Salt Lake Rolls Tide:

Utah capped a fabulous 13-0 year with a 31-17 win over Alabama in the Sugar Bowl and left many wondering why the Utes were not taken more seriously as a national title contender. Utah clinched an automatic BCS berth by sweeping to the Mountain West Conference title, but ended the regular season at No. 7 in the polls and sixth in the final BCS standings. En route to its perfect season, Utah won its opener at Michigan, defeated Oregon State—which defeated USC—and conquered ranked opponents Brigham Young, Texas Christian and Alabama. Utah's Sugar Bowl win lifted to 3-1 the record of "non-BCS" schools in BCS bowl games. Utah previously capped a perfect 2004 season with a win over Pittsburgh in the Fiesta Bowl.

See WHAT on Page 27